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The conferencing process the sociology graduate student experience.

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THE CONFERENCING PROCESS:
THE SOCIOLOGY GRADUATE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

by

© Debra Amy Matheson

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the academic conferencing process as it was experienced by sociology graduate students. In the absence of substantive research on conferences, a symbolic interactionist perspective was used to focus on graduate students' involvements as situated activity. As a conference-going graduate student, the researcher used participant observation and intensive interviewing to collect data. The findings revealed that participating students see conferences as an essential element of their professionalization that will help them to "get ahead" and provide exposure to the "real world." In dealing with these aspects of conferences, graduate students employ three main strategies: 1) impression management; 2) identity validation; 3) coping strategies. Using these strategies, they attempt to do a number of things: 1) As impression managers, they engage in "learning the ropes," becoming recognized, and marketing themselves; 2) As identity validators, they engage in assessing their academic identities, validating their scholarly identities, and maintaining their human identities; 3) As "copers", they engage in getting along, getting high, getting by, getting through, and getting comic relief. In order to successfully carry out these strategies, graduate students actively utilize a number of role tactics: 1) watching and listening, doing performances and initiating interaction,

and "politicking" tactics make up impression management strategies; 2) social comparison processes, "tuning in" and "tuning out," and seeing profs as people and holding on to the "fun" self make up identity validation strategies; 3) social support seeking, "boozing it up," taking a "free ride," "making like a professional," and seeing the humourous side make up coping strategies. Graduate student types emerged based on extent of conference experience, and interactive style. It is recommended that future research expand our substantive knowledge of the role of conferences in professional life. Given the unique aspects of conferences as structured, limited encounters, it is also recommended that similar situations be examined in an effort to further develop the generic concepts of this research.

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Dedication

To my mother and father, Velda and Allan Matheson, whose love, support, and encouragement have made my past, present, and future truly rich and exciting.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Conferences have become an important part of professional life in many occupations. They represent unique occasions that bring together people of diverse geographical locations, for structured, limited encounters. People who attend professional conferences are, in most cases, a select group who have demonstrated, or wish to demonstrate, some level of expertise in the profession to which they aspire. The conference setting provides situations in which participants do a variety of activities, including presenting and attending presentations of academic papers, engaging in debates and discussions, socializing with friends, colleagues or strangers, and touring the environs of the host location, to name only a few. Participants go to conferences for specific purposes, and their reasons for involvement are diverse. For example, some may be looking for a free holiday away from work; some may be intent upon bringing themselves up-to-date on the latest research developments; some are looking for new jobs; others want to socialize with colleagues who share similar academic interests; some students, for example, want to "check-out" the professional group in order to see how they "measure up", and to ascertain whether they want to become further involved with that group.

This thesis explores the academic conferencing process as it is experienced by graduate students who have involved themselves in one or more of this kind of professional event. Using Lofland's definition, the analytic focus is on the "strategies" or "thoughts and action constructed to deal with the situation" (Lofland 1976, 42) at conferences. One of the most pervasive themes that characterizes the graduate student experience lies in the fact that the majority who go to conferences aspire to the role of the professional academic. Through their involvement in various conference situations they are afforded an opportunity to take the role of these professionals. The research attempts to understand the ways in which graduate students perceive the "conference world", and handle themselves as participants in it.

Understanding professional conferences is an area that has been largely neglected in social science research, as has more generally the area of socialization into the role of professional scholar (Weiss 1981, 4). Through the use of a symbolic interactionist framework, the "processes by which interaction unfolds, the meaning experiences have for the participants, and the problematic and negotiable aspects of group life" (Prus 1984, 297) are explored as they pertain to graduate students within the conference setting. Participant observation in four conferences both as a conference organizer and as a participant, in addition to semi-structured interviews with graduate students at the

conferences afforded the researcher excellent opportunities for data collection. The intent of the project was to add to our substantive knowledge, and contribute to the development of some of the existing sociological concepts.

In terms of organization, the next section, Chapter 2, contains a review of the literature. In Chapter 3, the theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction is discussed. The methodology employed in this research is elaborated on in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides a structural and processual "backdrop" for the analysis chapters which follow. In this chapter, the nature of some of the more common conference situations, and the more notable activities which take place in those situations are described. Chapter 6 also "sets the stage" for the subsequent analytic chapters in that it explains the typologies which emerged through the data analysis process. The focus of Chapters 7, 8, and 9 is on the findings. In Chapter 10, a constructed typology, based on the typologies described in Chapter 6, is presented. Chapter 11 contains a brief summary of the preceding chapters, a discussion of the implications of the research findings, and some recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professional conferences represent an area that has been largely neglected in social science research. A search of the journals in education, business, psychology, and sociology revealed only minimal information on graduate students as participants in professional conferences. References to conferences, for the most part, centered on discussions held at conferences on graduate student-related topics, as opposed to information on graduate student participation at conferences. In the education journals, a popular theme has been conferences on training programs that have been developed, for example, to prepare graduate students for teaching and research assistantships, (Strickland 1986; Puccio 1986), or to improve their communication skills (Wahlstrom and Meese 1986; Johnston 1986). In the psychology literature, the word "conference" took on different meanings than the one understood in this research, referring to a small, informal group interaction, or a computer teaching approach (Brasseur and Anderson 1983; Hiltz 1986). The business journals offer some information on the socialization of "graduate trainees," employees who are being "groomed" to work in retail and wholesale companies, a very different situation from the case of graduate students at professional academic conferences (Wanous et al. 1984; Hebden 1986). As an illustration of

the paucity of information on this topic in the sociology literature, the term "conference" does not appear in the subject indexes of the sociology journals after 1985. Therefore, the scant information that was found in the journals dates back to before 1985. Information on the professional socialization of students, although not specific to conference situations, was also available in the sociology literature. In addition, newsletters circulated by professional associations served to provide information on the role of the graduate student within these organizations. Because of the various kinds of information covered in the literature search, this chapter has been divided into the following four subsections: 1) On Professional Conferences; 2) Professional Socialization; 3) Information and Commentary on the Profession; 4) Relevance to the Research.

On Professional Conferences

Pease (1967) looked at the relationship between doctoral students' relationships to faculty and their participation in professional activities. With reference to Merton's (1957) work in the area of adult socialization, he discusses the formal and informal socialization of the students' professional self through interaction with the faculty as a significant other. Pease found that 93% of his

sample of doctoral students reported their participation in professional meetings. He notes:

> Professional meetings can serve as a vehicle of socialization during the early stages of graduate study. The closer the student is to the degree, the more may the meetings also begin to serve as a marketplace in which to seek and inquire about employment opportunities (1967, 65).

Pease explained:

> Meetings provide the student with an opportunity to meet friends, to visit with former teachers and to meet "important personalities" of the field. Of equal importance is the possibility that the student seeks information there concerning his role as a member of a professional society (1967, 65).

Interestingly, he found that attendance at professional meetings was not related to students' frequency of contact with their major professors. Having an opportunity to discuss career plans with faculty members was, however, shown to be positively related to attendance at professional meetings. The data also suggest that there exists a positive relationship between the frequency of contact with the guidance committee and the student's contact with important scholars at professional meetings. Doctoral students who had established informal, personal relationships with faculty members were shown to participate more in professional activities than did those who engaged in only formal relationships with faculty members. Faculty encouragement was found to be most influential in terms of having students publish conference papers, and encouragement was also positively related to students' presenting papers

at meetings, their attendance at meetings, and their establishing of professional contacts there.

With regard to membership to a professional organization, Wright (1967) looked at the socialization of sociology graduate students, focusing on their first year of graduate school. He found that just over half of the students who had started graduate school with intentions of being a professional sociologist, ten years later were members of the American Sociological Association (ASA). Of those who lost interest in sociology as a career after having initially made a commitment, only twenty-five per cent were members of the ASA ten years later. None of those who started graduate school without the intention of being a professional sociologist became members of the ASA. Wright concluded that membership or non-membership to the ASA validated a student's earlier verbal occupational commitment or lack of commitment to sociology.

Professional Socialization

The study of adult socialization in general appears to be underemphasized.

> For all its importance, firm knowledge about adult socialization is surprisingly limited (Weiss 1981, 14).

It is not unanticipated then to find that there exists a scarcity of information on "the crucial factors governing socialization into the role of professional scholar" (Weiss

1981, 14). Most studies that search for these factors do not mention conferences as socializing influences, but instead attempt to isolate other variables that influence graduate student socialization.

For example, Weiss (1981) examined the socialization experience of graduate students by sampling from a variety of college and university departments across the United States. Through deductive analysis, she focused on the elements of the socialization experience which were seen as being relevant to the development of professional role commitment: productivity and self concept. Of interest is Weiss's finding that students who interacted frequently with faculty members on an informal basis were more likely than others to be highly productive and to hold a professional self-concept. Weiss also found that the majority of students became more committed to their professional role as they progressed through graduate school.

As another example, Gottlieb's study (1961) on the processes of socialization in graduate schools focused on how graduate students' perceptions of their relationships with faculty in their home schools affected changes in their career preferences. Of all his findings, the one comment that might relate to reasons for conference involvement was that students believed they were likely to gain prestige with faculty if they were to exhibit professional interest (1961, 127).

Other studies on the socialization of graduate students focus on the role of the graduate school and/or the faculty members as socializing agents. Studies of this type do not attend to the graduate student experience as it is shaped by exposure to events outside of the home school. The Rosen and Bates (1967) article entitled *"The Structure of Socialization In Graduate School"* serves as an example of how the literature tends to be focused on requisite events within the graduate students' home school setting as socializing factors. The following quote illustrates this point:

> The socialization sequence in a formal organization is marked by formal gateways through which each neophyte must pass. In the graduate school these include course completions, establishment of supervisory committees, approval of programs, passing of foreign language requirements and terminal examinations, approval of dissertation subject, and completion of dissertation (Rosen and Bates 1967, 79).

Studies like this one are, therefore, usually unrelated to the structures and processes that are unique to a conference situation, and consequently to graduate students' conference experiences.

While little attention has been paid to the graduate student who aspires to be a professional academic, more information exists on the socialization of students who are in professional schools such as medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, nursing, social work, and music. A review of these studies similarly reveals a neglect of conference

activity. Some of these studies do, however, provide information that may be useful for a better understanding of the conferencing process for graduate students who aspire to an academic profession.

Becker, Geer, Hughes, and Strauss (1961), in their work on medical students (*Boys In White* 1961), examine in detail the changing perceptions and behaviours that the students experience during their lengthy process of professionalization. The authors recognize that conferences play a part in the socialization of students, although they do not describe the nature of the "impact" of conferences:

> Conferences have an impact on a student's views toward: academics (ie. their studies, academic goals); their careers; their self esteem; confidence in their disciplines; toward their "idols", or the "well knowns" (1961, 172).

Haas and Shaffir's (1982) two articles on professional socialization focus on the experience of medical students in an innovative medical school. In one article, the authors use Goffman's (1959) concept of dramaturgy in their analysis of the professionalization process as performance. With regard to the students they state:

> If neophytes are to enact a difficult script to audiences' variable and sometimes exaggerated expectations, they must become good and self-confident actors by mastering increasingly difficult performance situations. And since the essence of the professions is the specific honorific status society affords them (Becker, 1962), the aspirant must be known to have passed through various difficult, mortifying rites of passage and given acceptable performances before whatever audience society designates as legitimating (Haas and Shaffir 1982, 187-188).

Because of the prestigious status of the medical profession, medical students are in a sense "on stage", and their performances scrutinized throughout the rigorous progression of their education. Through a series of rituals, they try to convincingly act out that which is expected of them by the professionals. Students acquire a new identity through the audience's validation of their performances of the role script.

Haas and Shaffir (1982), in a second article, discuss the ambiguous and anxiety-producing nature of the professionalization process as it exists for the medical students in an innovative medical school program. In order to convince the "legitimating" (Haas and Shaffir 1977) or professional audiences of their developing abilities, students adopt a "cloak of competence" (Haas and Shaffir 1977). The authors found that the students exhibit signs of professionalization much earlier than do students in traditional programs, because of things like the absence of tests or grades and the immediate contact with patients.

In an earlier work on adult socialization, Becker and Strauss (1956), in discussing the acquisition of a professional self concept, point to the change in identity that takes place as people move from one social position to another:

> Central to any account of adult identity is the relation of change in identity to change in social position; for it is characteristic of adult life

> to afford and force frequent and momentous passages from status to status (1956, 253).

Kadushin (1969) contrasts the situation of the medical students of Becker et al.'s studies with the music students who were the focus of his study on professionalization. He notes that music students actually engage in more "full fledged" professional performances (because they actually perform as professionals with the professionals), when compared to medical students who merely play the part of the professionals. Kadushin emphasizes the importance of taking on the professional role for the development of a professional self concept:

> Anticipatory socialization takes place only when the social structure of the school allows one actually to play the role that eventually will be one's full-time concern (1969, 403).

Hornosty studied what he refers to as "the fate of idealism" (1989, 121) among students in pharmacy schools. Hornosty (1989, 121) notes that unlike the studies (Becker and Geer 1958; Haas and Shaffir 1984; Morris and Sherlock 1971; Psathas 1968; Simpson (1967, 1972) which revealed a loss of, or drastic change in, students' idealism as they progressed through professional school, he found that the idealism that is seen among students at the beginning of their training is evidenced again during the latter phase of training, having been interrupted by a cynical period of thought. Hornosty's study is unique when compared to other studies on professionalization because of the fact that

pharmacy as a discipline has, over the past twenty years been attempting to establish a professional status (Mesler 1989, 142). The transformations in student idealism are partially due to the efforts put forth by the pharmacists, or significant others, within the discipline to endorse a professional status. Hornosty makes the important point that studies on professionalization have neglected to distinguish between professional socialization and professional education, and he suggests that these two processes may be very different, and deserving of individual consideration.

Schreiber (1987) sheds light on the process of socialization for first year graduate social work students. Using a symbolic interactionist framework, students' definitions of the graduate student situation were gleaned through interviews. The data revealed that these students' definitions changed over time in that their initial idealistic view of the profession was "slowly stripped away and replaced with a more reality based view of the profession and of the self" (Schreiber 1987, 17). By midway through the first semester, students have come to realize the difficulties of graduate school, and at this point they group together with peers who are experiencing the same concerns. Through the second semester, the students have established the perceptions and values of their education which will guide them through their second year of graduate

work. Schreiber quotes one student who, after first year, stated, "I don't think I am as narrow as I used to be" (Schreiber 1987, 21).

Having considered these studies on some aspects of professional socialization, it is useful to draw attention to Becker and Carper's study (1956) which looked at the differences in occupational identities among graduate students in physiology, mechanical engineering, and philosophy. They found that the professionalization process was notably different for the philosophers when compared to the physiologists and the engineers, and these differences were attributed to a number of structural variants between the physical sciences and philosophy, for example: formal academic structure of the university; degree of sponsorship by professors; and acquisition of specific skills. This study suggests that among disciplines, professionalization experiences differ, according to the structural components of the situations within each discipline.

Information and Commentary on the Profession

In an attempt to ascertain what has been the role of graduate students at conferences, newsletters published by some of the professional associations which hold annual conferences were perused. Of particular interest is the Canadiar Sociology and Anthropology Association (CSAA) newsletter, *Society/Societe*, (1983-1989) since two CSAA

conferences were used as research sites for this study. The various topics of discussion in these newsletters have not dealt with the professionalization of graduate students. This is not to say that the professionalization of other groups has been ignored. It is noted, for example, that attention has been paid to the socialization of women into the profession of sociology. The CSAA began to monitor the status of female sociologists in 1971 (Mackie 1986, 11), and there are many articles since that time that have addressed the situation of women within the discipline. First year sociology students have also received attention as a group which is being socialized into the study of sociology. Articles which critique introductory text books (Hinch 1988) as well as the styles of teaching used to introduce sociology to undergraduates (Morgan and Stolzman 1983) are in keeping with the objectives of the CSAA as outlined in Section 2.1 of the by-laws:

> The object of the Association shall be the encouragement of research and publication in, and teaching and general development of, sociology and anthropology (*Society/Societe* 1987, 11, 3:11).

Given the attention accorded these and other issues for which sub-committees have been formed, it is curious to consider the exclusion of a discussion of the professionalization process of the graduate student population, and the potential benefits which may result from exposures to, and active participation in, conferences.

Notwithstanding these comments, it must be noted that graduate students have not been totally ignored by the CSAA. An examination of how they have evolved over the past five years as a group within the CSAA, for example, is warranted. In the minutes of the 1983 Annual General Meeting (AGM) (*Society/Societe* 1984, 8, 1) it is noted that student representatives at that meeting, who were then called the "Student Concerns Task Force", asked for and received a change of status to that of a full Sub Committee of the CSAA Executive. It was also noted in the minutes that:

> The major goal of the Student Concerns Task Force has been to increase student participation in the Association (1984, 8, 1:16).

It might be expected that once granted sub-committee status, graduate student issues would receive attention similar to that given to the above-mentioned groups. However, a review of the newsletters following that 1983 meeting leads to some different impressions of the nature of graduate student participation in the CSAA over the past five years. The related information is based on student membership rates, and on the annual reports of student representatives found in a section of the AGM minutes entitled, "Student Sub Committee." The following discussion of each of these areas suggests that although graduate students are recognized by the CSAA, (and in fact hold two seats on the Executive Committee), the importance of the conference experience for the professionalization of graduate students is an area that

has been, and continues to be, neglected by the professionals.

It was reported at the 1983 AGM (*Society/Societe* 1984, 8, 1:13) that there had been an "increase in student members" during 1982 (no actual numbers are given), and it was suggested that this growth was due to "a special membership campaign". The 1984 AGM membership report (*Society/Societe* 1985, 9, 1:19) did not provide a breakdown of the student membership numbers, while the 1985 AGM minutes report (*Society/Societe* 1986, 10, 1:13) "a slight drop in individual members" as a whole, from 1984 to 1985. The minutes suggest that the decline reflects a decrease in all of the membership categories, including that of "student". This suspected decline in student memberships is confirmed at the 1986 AGM (*Society/Societe* 1987, 11, 1:8) when it is reported that "the number of student members had dropped by about 2.5%." This trend appears to have continued for it is noted in the 1987 AGM minutes (*Society/Societe*, 1988, 12, 2:17): "Students represent 22% of the membership but their numbers are decreasing." The decline in student memberships is especially significant in light of the fact that the memberships in other categories have been generally increasing over the past five years.

In looking more specifically at the role of students at conferences, the information contained in the "Student Sub Committee" sections of the AGM minutes (*Society/Societe*

1984, 8, 1; 1985, 9, 1; 1986, 10, 1; 1987, 11, 1) suggests that issues relating to student involvement in conferences have an unobtrusive profile. Although graduate students have established themselves as a separate entity with voting power, their growth (not only in terms of numbers, but in terms of agendas) has been limited. Perhaps one of the most compelling arguments for this position is that acknowledgement given the Student Concerns Sub Committee in the AGM minutes has become more brief over the years, and there has consistently been an absence of articles which address graduate student issues. It seems that students may have, at one time, been more recognized by the CSAA. For example, in 1983, 88 students were assigned travel grants compared to only 11 faculty members (Society/Societe 1984, 8, 1:16). The impression gained from more recent minutes is that there are only a "select" number of graduate students who are members of the association. It also appears that those who are affiliated are, in essence, peripheral members of the association who receive only "token" reference by the professionals. This direct excerpt from the minutes refers to this graduate student situation without explaining how it might be improved:

> Gayle Macdonald suggested that students are not sufficiently aware of nor integrated into the CSAA, and (she) suggested ways in which this situation could be remedied (*Society/Societe* 1987, 11, 1:13).

It is useful to note that even though the October 1987 newsletter (Ramu 1987, 11, 3:15) contains an article on the "critical issues facing the CSAA" and suggests "ways in which they could be addressed," graduate students are not mentioned. AGM minutes in *Society/Societe* that pertain to the sub-committee on student concerns include the notification of events organized for students, such as publishing workshops, "meet the prof" and student employment sessions, and a networking program. While these attempts to involve students are admirable in theory, this research suggests that relative to the total population, only a few sociology graduate students are getting involved in conferences.

The American Sociological Association (ASA) newsletter, *ASA Footnotes*, published nine times a year, was reviewed from January 1984 (12, 1) to November 1988 (16, 8). As was surmised from the CSAA *Society/Societe* newsletters, it seems that the professionalization of graduate students has received scant attention from the ASA. The earliest reference to graduate students found in this five-year sample was contained in a report that had been submitted by the Membership Committee (Holland and Howery 1984). For the purpose of finding out ways to increase membership, the committee had completed a survey of the ASA membership at that time. The report quotes forty suggestions that came

out of that survey, two of which pertain to the issue of student membership:

> Make a concerted effort to encourage more students, particularly graduate students, to join the ASA (ASA *Footnotes* 1984, 12, 5:11).
>
> Contact Alpha Kappa Delta and see if AKD advisors will help with getting students to join the ASA (ASA *Footnotes* 1984, 12, 5:11).

Mention of students in subsequent ASA *Footnotes* volumes was not found until March 1988 when the following advertisement appears in the bottom right-hand corner on the last page of the newsletter:

> Looking for a Sociologically Correct Gift?
> Give a gift of ASA membership. Student memberships are $26 and include one ASA journal. What a great way to recognize a completed MA or PhD (sic) or a special honors student. Link your student to their professional association. For additional information, contact the ASA Executive Office, 1722 N Street NW, Washington, DC 20036; (202) 833-3410 (ASA *Footnotes* 1988, 16, 3:8)..

In the November 1988 issue of *Footnotes*, (16, 8:9) in a section entitled "The Whys of ASA Membership", two letters appear which are worthy of note. In the first letter, (APPENDIX A), Earl Babbie describes how, as a graduate student, he came to be associated with the ASA, and how his involvement positively influenced his professional life as a scoiologist:

> I first joined the ASA some 25 years ago, as a graduate student at Berkeley. I seem to recall that it happened in a theory class...and someone (let's just say the "pusher") passed out ASA membership cards. The pusher made it sound as though joining the ASA was a rite of passage - a short cut to joining the big kids of

> sociology....In fact, the prevailing sentiment seemed to be that you weren't a "real" sociologist unless you *did it*....Publications like **Footnotes** exposed me to the "professional," as distinct from the "scientific" aspect of sociology (1988, 9).

The second letter (APPENDIX B), written by Lorna Lueker (a graduate student at the time) similarly "sings the praises" of membership to the ASA based on her personal experience. In fact, Lueker's experiences closely coincide with the researcher's impressions and the conceptual framework that emerged in this research. For example, she states:

> The immediate benefit to graduate students joining the ASA is that it brings them into touch with the professional community of sociology....Active participation in the ASA can aid one in making the transition from starry-eyed student to professional sociologist....The opportunity to hear well-known and renowned sociologists - who until that time were simply authors of the books I read - was exciting (1988, 9).

The *Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT)/Association Canadienne des Professeurs D'Universite (ACPU) bulletin* was reviewed from March 1987 (34, no. 3) to March 1989 (36, no. 3). This newsletter appeared to neglect the topic of graduate student professionalization more than those newsletters already mentioned. By attending to graduate students as "budding" members, the association might better realize its goal to establish an all encompassing membership of professoriate. As was noted in one of the conclusions of the CAUT/ACPU External Review Committee:

> We consider it an essential goal of the profession to strive to keep together, and to keep pursuing

> that goal until every member of the profession is a member of the Association (*bulletin* 1987, 14).

Like the *CAUT/ACPU bulletin*, the *University Affairs/Affaires Universitaires* newsletters reviewed, (May 1987 - March 1989), overlook the role of conferencing for the graduate student population. Substantive reports are included about the focuses of discussions at conferences. Professors' treatment of undergraduate students recurs as a topic of importance. The issues concerning minority groups such as women and immigrants are regularly addressed. However, graduate student issues generally seem to go unnoticed.

In summary, the impression gained from a review of these newsletters suggests that the professionalization of graduate students who aspire to academic careers, and more so, the professionalization of those who are less committed to academia, has received little attention by the members of the professional associations.

Relevance to the Research

For the purposes of this research, the above-noted summary of the literature furnishes some information that can be utilized in understanding the graduate student experience at conferences. The suggested parallels that exist between the literature and graduate students at conferences are summarized as follows:

1. Conferences serve as important anticipatory socialization (Kadushin 1956) and professional socialization experiences for graduate students (Pease 1967; Becker et al. 1961).

2. Sociology graduate students who are members of professional associations represent approximately half of the population that started graduate school with the intention of becoming a professional sociologist (Wright 1967). Therefore, those who attend conferences are likely to aspire to careers as professional sociologists.

3. Conference-going graduate students must become skillful actors at conferences if they are to successfully pass through the "rites of passage" imposed by the professionals (Haas and Shaffir 1982).

4. Because of the ambiguous nature of conferences, graduate students demonstrate signs of professionalism sooner than they might in more structured situations (Haas and Shaffir 1977).

5. Conference involvement fosters changes in identity (Becker and Strauss 1956) and idealism (Hornosty 1989; Schreiber 1987) for graduate students.

6. Professional education needs to be distinguished from professional education (Hornosty 1989). Conferences, although they may serve to provide professional education to a certain extent, are seen as involving predominately professional socialization experiences for graduate students.

7. Most of the research on socialization into the role of professional scholar does not account for differences among the disciplines (Pease 1967; Weiss 1981; Gottlieb 1961; Rosen and Bates 1967). The conferencing experiences of sociology students are seen as being unique from students in other disciplines, given that professionalization processes appear to differ among disciplines (Becker and Carper 1956).

8. Graduate student involvement at conferences is minimal when compared to the total number of students registered in graduate programs, and the number of professionals in attendance at conferences. Professional associations have not given much attention to the issue of the professionalization of graduate students.

In summary, there does not exist information on conferences which would point in any specific theoretical

direction. This research has attended to the emergence of theoretical concepts, as will be explained in the next chapter on the symbolic interactionist perspective.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

A symbolic interactionist perspective has been used as the framework for the analysis of the conferencing process. As a theoretical approach, symbolic interactionism is aimed at capturing the dynamic, processual nature of the social world of study.

Symbolic interactionism is built upon three main premises. Firstly:

> People act toward things on the basis of the meaning that things have for them (Blumer 1969, 2).

"Things", therefore have no inherent meaning, rather individuals attribute their own meanings to them. Secondly:

> Meanings arise out of a process of social interaction with other people (Blumer 1969, 2).

The process of interaction is, therefore integral to the formulation of meanings. Thirdly:

> Meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process (Blumer 1969, 2).

This premise emphasizes the non-static, ever-changing nature of meanings by recognizing individuals' abilities to actively interpret and re-interpret social worlds.

From these premises, Blumer developed the central ideas of a symbolic interactionist interpretation of human society and conduct (1969). Fundamentally, human beings are active creatures who perform activities in a variety of situations through their interactions with other human beings.

According to Blumer, all structural and processual sociological concepts stem from the notion of human beings as active participants in group life. Furthermore, human beings act according to the meanings that they attribute to what they perceive to be the components, or "objects" of their social world, including physical, social, and abstract objects. The defining and interpreting of objects is a continually evolving process for human actors engaged in interaction, or "joint action" (1969, 17), with one another.

The symbolic interactionist approach differs noticeably from the positivist approaches in which the business of data collection is prefaced by the establishment of a clearly defined theoretical framework and explicit hypotheses. Glaser and Strauss discuss what they see as being the drawbacks of a deductive approach:

> Potential theoretical sensitivity is lost when the sociologist commits himself exclusively to one specific preconceived theory.....for then he becomes doctrinaire and can no longer "see around" either his pet theory or any other (1967, 46).

Following the premises of symbolic interactionism, a researcher enters a field of study with a general sociological perspective, or "sensitizing concepts" which serve as a "rough" guide for the research inquiries (Blumer 1969). The recurring themes and concepts become realized during, and/or following the data collection process. Because guiding concepts preceded this study, and the emergence of theoretical concepts came about during the data

analysis process, this research exemplifies the grounded theory approach as espoused by Glaser and Strauss:

> A discovered, grounded theory.....will tend to combine mostly concepts and hypotheses that have emerged from the data with some existing ones that are clearly useful (1967, 46).

Unlike positivist orientations which search for the causal "why's" of social life, the focus of attention in this research is on the process of "how" graduate students handle themselves at conferences. According to Hewitt:

> The analysis of social process looks to how patterns of behaviour are characteristic of various groups or categories, such as social classes, are actually formed, sustained and changed by individuals acting in cooperation or conflict with one another in real situations (1984, 7).

In order to be able to make sense of the social world in this way, symbolic interactionists believe that it is necessary to establish an intimate familiarity with the process being studied. Blumer stressed the inseparable nature of the relationship that exists between the theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction, and the methodology used by those who subscribe to this perspective.

> The only way to get...(the) assurance that premises, problems, data, relations, concepts, and interpretations are empirically valid...is to go directly to the empirical social world - to see through meticulous examination of it whether one's premises or root images of it, one's questions and problems posed for it, the data one chooses out of it, the concepts through which one sees and analyzes it, and the interpretations one applies to it are actually borne out (Blumer 1969, 32).

The conceptual framework of this research came about through such an intimate familiarity with the conferencing process. This chapter highlights some of the concepts which emerged as being integral to the understanding of how graduate students handle themselves at conferences.

In building on "symbolic interactionism" and "reality construction theory" as developed by Blumer (1969) and Berger and Luckmann (1966), Prus highlights the symbolic interactionist approach as being "perspectival, reflective, negotiable, relational and processual" in nature (1988, 5). Prus's emphasis of the processual nature of human behaviour is central to this thesis. He stresses that the nature of social life is always changing, and never fixed or permanent. In this regard, his use of the "career contingencies model" (1984) includes the following concepts which are useful for this research: "role careers" and "multiple involvements."

In utilizing the concept of role careers, the researcher examines "the ways in which people become involved in roles, continue these involvements, and become disinvolved and/or reinvolved in these pursuits" (Prus 1984, 300). This research focuses on the "situated" aspects of role careers (Prus 1988, 7) in that the analysis is directed toward the "here and now", or particular aspects of conference involvement, as opposed to an analytic approach which would view conference involvements over a more

extensive period of time. Within this temporal context, of particular importance is Prus's notion of "intensified involvement" which encompasses how graduate students handle themselves in actual conference situations.

> Being involved denotes the sequencing of people's participation in settings (Prus 1987, 275).

This concept, as defined by Prus, consists of the following five components: ideology, identity, commitment, activity, and relationships (1984, 303). According to Prus:

> People's involvements in situations can vary immensely along...(these)...dimensions (1987, 276)

In brief, these concepts have the following meanings (Prus 1987, 276): "Ideology" refers to the process of "internalizing perspectives (or) viewpoints (which are) consistent with particular involvements" (Prus 1987, 276). "Identity" involves developing definitions of the self. "Activities" refers to the process of handling oneself competently and with composure in situations. "Commitments" concern the degree to which a person invests in the activity or the relationship. "Relationships" indicate people's experiences relative to interactions with others in situations.

Multiple involvements occur on a simultaneous and/or sequential basis, each involvement having the potential to interfere with an actor's other involvements (Prus 1984, 298-299). Therefore, doing an activity occurs not in isolation, but amidst a backdrop of many other activities of

which an actor is aware. Given the many activities that are available to participants during the conferences, it is important to view involvement in an activity within the context of other competing activities in order to convey an accurate picture of the nature of social life at a conference.

As is the case for actors in any social world, participation in a professional conference involves the processes of interaction and interpretation for all those in attendance. Because of prior socialization experiences, even the first-time conference attenders have at least some notion of what types of activities will be taking place, and who will be responsible for doing what during those activities. As noted by Hewitt:

> Through socialization, we learn generally about human behaviour (1984, 75).

Conferencing is a socializing experience for graduate students because they are learning about one aspect of professional life for a sociologist. They are engaged in a process of professional socialization or "professionalization", since it is issues surrounding their movement to a professional status that are a part of their socialization experience. According to Haas and Shaffir:

> Professionalization involves the moral and symbolic transformation of a lay person into an individual who can take on the special role and status claimed by the professional...In order for individuals to make such significant status changes, they must undergo public initiations or

> rites de passage that prepare them for their new role (1982, 135-136).

The nature of the professional conference is such that many activities and interactions are new when compared to those within the students' "home" departments.

The ways in which students ultimately perceive the conference experience, and the ways in which they conduct themselves in conference situations become understandable when viewed within the contexts of role taking and role making. Unlike other life forms, humans are unique in their capacity to objectify themselves and act toward themselves as objects. As noted by Blumer:

> Like other objects, the self object emerges from the process of social interaction in which other people are defining a person to himself (1969, 12).

It is because of the perception of "self" as an object that individuals are able to take the role of another person and act toward themselves on the basis of how they see themselves from the other person's perspective. Through interaction with other graduate students and professionals at these conferences, students engage in this process of taking the role of another (Charon 1979, 97). They learn the attitudes, feelings, and actions which are characteristic of the professional role, and the various ways in which each professional uniquely makes her or his role. At the same time, the students engage in a process of creating and modifying their own version of the established

stereotype of the professional role. They each create a personal adaptation of what they interpret to be the role of professional sociologist, in an attempt to make themselves comfortable in the role. Hewitt differentiates between the concepts of "role taking" and "role making":

> Role taking is the process wherein a person occupies the position (role) of another and looks at the situation from that vantage point. Role making is the process wherein the person constructs his or her own activity in a situation so that it fits the definition of the situation, is consonant with one's own role, and meshes with the activity of others (1984, 81).

Although these processes are unique, they are inextricably related, as Hewitt explains:

> The two processes are intimately linked to one another. There can be no role-making without role-taking, for one cannot construct a role without at some points occupying the perspective of the other and viewing self and situation from that vantage point. And there can be no role-taking without role-making. As interaction proceeds, the act of oneself and of others document the roles that are being made (1984, 81).

As symbolic interactionism concentrates on the processes in social life, the research focus here is on graduate students as active, role-making individuals. It is necessary however to view these processes within the structural aspects of conferences, for process and structure are interrelated.

The concepts of role-making and role-taking lead to a discussion of the "dynamics of doing roles", or "role tactics" (Lofland and Lofland, 1984, 82). A primary focus in this study is on understanding the role tactics that are employed by graduate students as they engage in various

strategies of action (Lofland 1976). "Strategies" refer to the overall "game plans" that are used to achieve specific goals. As noted by Lofland (1976, 60) strategies include aspects of dramaturgy (Goffman 1959) in that individuals in a sense "act out" their roles. Goffman takes the concept of "role" and puts it "back on stage" (Wallace et al. 1986, 224) giving us this dramaturgical perspective. Goffman notes that:

> When an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others that it is in his interests to convey (1959, 4).

Aspiring professionals attend conferences to establish contact with individuals who may help them in their future careers. In order for such contacts to "pay off", they must convey favorable impressions to other conference participants. While professionals are engaged in a process of improving and maintaining reputations, graduate students are attempting to establish reputations. Goffman's concept of impression management (1959) allows for an examination of the strategies used by graduate students in their attempts to positively impress the professionals and other conference participants.

Charon (1979) notes that "roletaking" makes it possible for an individual to see her/his self as an object. The label that an individual attaches to the self is considered to be that person's identity. This concept of "identity"

surfaced as a recurring theme during the data analysis. In Charon's words:

> Identities are our names, what we call our self...Defining self, like all the other actions the individual has toward his or her self, is carried out in interaction with others (1979, 76).

Compared to the professional reference group, graduate students' identities as sociologists are in a formative stage. Conferences offer opportunities for graduate students to validate identities that are associated with the role of "professional sociologist." People's tendency to seek confirmation of their identities through association with others is explained by Charon:

> The identities are labels used...by the reference group and the significant other of the individual. And these identities become central to us over time as our interaction reconfirms them over and over (1979, 77).

The point has been made that it is through interactions that people define and redefine both themselves, each other and situations (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Similarly, for the purposes of self-definition and evaluation, people tend to use social comparison to measure their opinions, beliefs and evaluation of their abilities against those of other people (Festinger 1954).

> To the extent that objective, non-social means are not available, people evaluate their opinions and abilities by comparison repectively with the opinions and abilities of others (Festinger 1954, 118).

Graduate students are novices within their discipline, relative to those who have completed their graduate studies. They are familiar with the opinions and abilities of some of the undergraduate students, graduate students, and professors within their own departments, and they have utilized these individuals as a social basis for comparison. In the conference situation, graduate students are exposed to a much larger group of similar and higher status individuals, who make up a more representative reference group. Here there are no objective measures (for example, a grade in a course, a mark on an examination) of participants' opinions and attitudes. Consequently, graduate students rely on the use of social comparison in order to get a sense of how they "measure up" to these peers and significant others.

According to Prus, symbolic interactionism focuses "on the processes by which interaction unfolds, the meaning experiences have for the participants, and the problematic and negotiable aspects of group life" (Prus 1984, 297). Conference situations are frequently problematic for graduate students in a number of ways. Considering the stresses imposed upon graduate students given their lower status and their attempts to impression manage, role take, role make, identity validate and socially compare themselves with others at the conference, it is not surprising that feelings of anxiety would be a common element of their

experience. In fact, novices may repeatedly reflect on the strategies that they use to cope with uncomfortable predicaments. This problematic situation creates "role strain" (Goode 1960) between perceived expectations of roles as students, versus perceived expectations of roles as "new professionals." Because these roles are often perceived as incompatible, role strain that results may lead to a state of "cognitive dissonance" for graduate students (Festinger 1957). Graduate students may expect to adopt a professional role at conferences, yet they are "only" graduate students who lack the formal status, and perhaps the commitment and/or the abilities to qualify as professionals. This inconsistency creates tensions which the graduate student must resolve through a variety of role tactics, including affiliating with others who are also experiencing anxiety, (Schachter 1959), and withdrawing from situations which would demand conflicting role performances (Goode 1960).

In summary, people are seen as active and creative, deriving meanings through a process of interaction with others. Some of the concepts significant to this study are: joint action; intimate familiarity; career contingencies; professionalization; role taking and making; strategies; role tactics; dramaturgy; impression management; identity; social comparison; role strain; cognitive disonance. How intimate familiarity with the data was achieved will be described in the next chapter on methodology.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

According to Denzin, "methodology": "represents the principal ways in which sociologists act on their environment...it is through their methods that they make their research public and reproducible by others" (1978, 6). This research involved the use of qualitative methodology for the purpose of data collection. Glaser and Strauss contrast this methodological approach with those of a deductive research design:

> The initial decisions for theoretical collection of data are based only on a general sociological perspective and on a general subject or problem area...The initial decisions are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework (1967, 45).

The use of qualitative methods is in keeping with the theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction, which necessitates that the researcher develop a thorough understanding of the social world of study, im this case, the social world of study being graduate students in conferencing situations. Denzin described the process of doing research through establishing an "intimate familiarity" with the data:

> Sensitizing concepts are not immediately made operational, only after the field has been entered, and the processes representing the concept and the specific meanings attached to it by the persons observed are known (1978, 15).

As will be explained, it was the researcher's familiarity

with this area of social life that preceded the formulation of the research project. Blumer advised:

> Respect the nature of the empirical world and organize a methodological stance to reflect that respect (1969, 60).

The methodological style of this research is in keeping with Blumer's belief that it is crucial for researchers to have "firsthand knowledge" (Blumer 1969, 38) of the area of study. He stated:

> The task of scientific study is to lift the veils that cover the area of group life that one proposes to study.....The veils are lifted by getting close to the area and by digging deep into it through careful study (1969, 39).

Accordingly, the following means were used to establish the data base: "participant observation" and "intensive interviewing" (Lofland 1984). Both of the methods were employed for the purpose of ensuring valid and reliable research results. According to Denzin, the use of "triangulation" or "multiple methods" increases the likelihood of attaining a more complete "picture" of the area of study (1978). He explains his thinking as follows:

> Both the concepts and research methodology act as empirical sensitizers of scientific observation. Concepts and methods open new realms of observation, but concommitantly close others. Two important consequences follow: If each method leads to different features of empirical reality, then no single method can ever completely capture all the relevant features of that reality; consequently, sociologists must learn to employ multiple methods in the analysis of the same empirical events. This is termed triangulation. (1978, 15).

Before addressing these methods, it is necessary to discuss the nature of the settings in which the research took place, for the circumstances of the setting impact the data collection process.

The Research Sites

Four conferences provided the data base. In order of attendance, these were as follows: 1) Qualitative Research Conference, McMaster University (1987); 2) Canadian Sociology and Anthropology Association (CSAA) Meetings, McMaster University (1987); 3) Interactionist Research '88, University of Windsor (1988); 4) CSAA Meetings, University of Windsor (1988). A general description of conference settings is found in the discussion of "structures" in Chapter 5, however the conferences differ in ways that need to be noted.

Firstly, the "Qualitative", or "Interactionist" meetings are smaller-scale conferences than are the CSAA conferences, and this factor makes for some important distinctions. The Interactionist conferences involve approximately sixty to seventy registrants (a few additional participants will be in attendance who have not registered, usually these being graduate students). It is therefore a much more "intimate" type of conference, when compared to the CSAA registration list which shows approximately 400 paying participants (Ramu 1987, 11) (this count being in

addition to approximately 2500 other registrants from other professional associations who are on site). Participants at the Interactionist Conference tend to know the others in attendance through prior meetings, or come to know the others (at least to some extent) during the course of the conference. At the CSAA conferences, it is more commonly the case that participants will know fewer individuals relative to the number of people who are in attendance. With regard to these differences, a graduate student who was familiar with both conferences made the following comment:

> *(The Interactionist Conference) is a closer-knit group, (there) is more of a vested interest in what the other people have to say, socially and intellectually, and (there is) a stronger sense of belonging to the group (Interview #17).*

Secondly, the conferences differ in terms of the orientations of the participants, and consequently the nature of the session topics. Participants at the Interactionist conferences are more uniform in their theoretical and methodological perspectives, and they share similar research interests. The same graduate student, in discussing the two conferences, suggests a difference in the level of involvement between the two conferences given the more focused nature of the Interactionist Conference. With regard to the participation of those at the Interactionist Conference she says:

> *(There is) a genuine interest in the subject matter...you find the motivation a lot higher in a conference like you had two weeks ago (at the Interactionist Conference) than what you would*

have in a lot of groups here at the Learneds (CSAA) (Interview #17).

Because there is only one paper being presented at any given time at the Interactionist conferences, the audience is not split between a number of different sessions, and there is usually a good turn-out for each of the paper presentations. In contrast, the orientations of the participants at the CSAA conferences as a whole are much more diverse, and the audiences are divided among the various sessions which are concurrently in progress. A presenter there may find only a very few people in attendance, due to one or more competing sessions which have "taken" potential audience members. The following account by a graduate student who had presented at the CSAA illustrates this point:

> *There were three of us that were presenting...and, ah, I think a couple of other people wandered in during the course of the thing, so we're talking maybe seven people the whole time...Let's just say it was possible during the course of the presentation to spend three minutes looking each person in the eye.....So it was a bit different than the Ethnographic, or the Interactionist (Interview #10).*

Having acknowledged the main differences in the nature of the Interactionist and CSAA conferences, the discussion moves to an examination of each of the methodological approaches employed.

Participant Observation

As defined by Lofland:

> Participant observation refers to the process in which an investigator establishes and sustains a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a scientific understanding of that association (1984, 12).

The idea for this research project arose as a result of the researcher's participation as a graduate student in what was her first professional conference. The researcher, in discussing her conference experiences with her thesis advisor, was advised to compile field notes of her experiences, observations, and impressions, possibly to be used as the groundwork for a future paper. Once her role as a researcher had been formalized, the researcher's identity as a participant observer was made known at the three subsequent conferences of study. This participation afforded the researcher excellent opportunities for becoming familiar with the social world of study, and for data collection. At each of the four conferences, the researcher was involved in the various activities of the process: attending papers; touring the publishers' displays; eating meals at the conference centre; socializing at breaks and at the nightly after-hour hospitality room parties. At the 1988 conferences at the University of Windsor, in addition to these activities, she engaged in the conferencing process in an organizational capacity. Prior to the conferences, she was involved in almost all of the aspects of conference preparation (i.e. she was not involved in the decisions involving the acceptance/rejection of papers). These tasks

were numerous, and included: developing a mailing list and corresponding with conference delegates; organizing conference registration, accommodation, food service, paper duplication, sign printing; putting together the Program booklet; preparing for social gatherings. Once the conferences were underway, the researcher worked as a registrar, a cashier, a conference information desk clerk, a taxi driver, a meal ticket attendant, a video camera woman, a hostess, and a bartender. During and following each day's activities, field notes were compiled either in writing, or through tape recording.

Intensive Interviewing

According to Lofland:

> Intensive interviewing, also known as "unstructured interviewing" is a guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis...the intensive interview seeks to discover the informant's experience of a particular topic or situation (1984, 12).

In addition to participant observation, twenty-five intensive interviews with graduate students were tape-recorded during the CSAA Meetings at the University of Windsor (1988). Interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to two hours in length. Graduate students were interviewed where they felt most comfortable, for example in the lobby of the University Centre, outside in the "beer garden", or in the researcher's office on campus. In addition, numerous

casual conversations were held with graduate students, and later recorded through field notes. On a couple of occasions, casual conversations were tape-recorded. At the CSAA registration desk, delegates were asked if they were graduate students, and, if identified as such, they were requested to book an appointment for an interview. Graduate students were advised as to the nature of the research, and their response to the project was, it seemed, overwhelmingly positive.

Attempts were made to have the participants elaborate on their perceptions of the conferencing process. The themes of the interview questions included: how they became involved; what activities they involved themselves in; how they selected these activities and how they went about doing them; what was the nature of their socializing; how they went about meeting someone they hadn't met before; how they handled themselves in novel situations; how they handled themselves in uncomfortable situations; how people reacted to them; how they felt about the conference in general; what impressed and depressed them.

Analysis

Lofland and Lofland (1984) describe in detail the phases of analysis for qualitative data. This process involves two stages: firstly, the data needs to be filed

and coded; secondly, the data must be organized into the written report.

For the purposes of filing and coding, the tape-recorded interviews and field notes were transcribed chronologically through the use of an IBM Wordperfect program. It had originally been intended, given our present-day computer sophistication, to use the Gator computer program for qualitative data analysis. An attractive feature of this program is the fact that it allows for the multiple coding of each section of text, generating cross-referenced lists of textual material that support each concept. In the initial stages of transcribing, conceptual categories were demarcated (according to the method indicated in the Gator manual) as they were identified. Unfortunately, attempts to have the Gator program operate properly failed. After numerous attempts to locate the nature of the problem, (including contacting the authors of the program, and ordering what was to be a more compatible program), the researcher finally decided to discontinue efforts to use the Gator program. Therefore, the transcribing process continued without the use of Gator. Once the transcriptions were complete, the researcher attempted to "make some sense" of the data through the use of "thinking units" (Lofland 1984, 73). As explained by Lofland:

> A unit is a tool to use in scrutinizing your data log (1984, 73).

Based on the interview and field note data, topical categories were generated according to some of the units in Lofland's "thinking unit" framework: I) Meanings; II) Practices; III) Episodes; IV) Encounters; V) Roles (1979, 73-92). In addition, lists of "topically designated actions and activities" (Lofland 1978, 49) which took place at conferences were produced. (Examples of such topical activites are: giving papers; attending papers; socializing; eating; scheduling.) Using these various lists that were compiled as a guide, the data was studied for evidence of quotes which would correspond to the items of the lists. It was during this stage that the concepts "emerged" from the data, leading to a "general design" (Lofland 1984, 13) for the second stage of report writing. The traditional "cut and paste" method was used to create piles of conceptual categories. As textual material was cut from each page with a razor blade, it was labelled according to the interviewee number, and the concept(s) that it reflected. It should be noted that during this process, conceptual categories emerged which had not been considered during the initial generation of topical categories within the "thinking unit" framework.

The second stage of the analysis process involved concerted analysis, in that decisions were made about selecting the units of analysis from the coded data. The researcher entered what Lofland refers to as a "period of

quiet contemplation...and provisional writing" (1984, 138). It was during this period of time that the written report began to take shape within the general framework. The researcher worked to interpenetrate the data and the analysis in a balanced way, in keeping with the goal of attaining "an appropriately elaborated analysis" (Lofland and Lofland 1984, 146). Through the continual process of selecting and organizing the units of analysis, writing and rewriting, the "pieces of the puzzle" eventually fell into a pattern, resulting in the following six analysis chapters of this report. In the next chapter, (and the first of the analysis chapters), the prominent structures and processes which emerged during the data analysis process are described, in a sense "setting the stage" for the subsequent analysis of graduate students at conferences.

CHAPTER 5

STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

As a prelude to the analysis chapters, this section describes the structural and processual aspects of conferences, by examining some of the usual conference situations and a few of the more common conference activities which take place within the realm of multiple involvements.

Situations

As defined by Lofland, a "situation" involves:

> The wholistic array of people, physical objects, spaces and time periods that an acting unit takes into account in constructing its action, or that constrains action, regardless of whether the acting unit consciously takes a given aspect into account (1976, 26).

Therefore, it is the structural aspects of conferences that are clarified through a description of conference situations, and a discussion of these has been organized around the following themes: 1) the campus setting; 2) the conference program; 3) the role of the graduate student.

The Campus Setting

The academic conferences of interest in this research were conducted at university campuses. Virtually all of the conference activities take place on campus, and arrangements must be made by the hosting university for paper-presenting

locations, publishers' display areas, sleeping quarters, and eating and drinking spots. In many ways the conference participants' routines imitate those of the university students who live in residence during the school year. At the larger conferences, the sessions are held in classrooms for the most part, with the exception of instances where there is a key-note speaker, in which case an auditorium-style setting is used. At the smaller conferences, the papers are presented in a large meeting room which accommodates all of those in attendance. Publishers' displays occupy a large auditorium in which a series of tables are set up for book displays. Most conference-goers in these particular conferences stay in dormitory rooms on campus during the conference because such arrangements are convenient, and are conducive for easy involvement in activities and for interaction with others at the conference. Conference-organized meals, held in the cafeteria and costing a certain price per meal, are usually buffet style and lavish. Over-indulgence can easily result, especially since full meals are served for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Canteen-type sandwiches, snacks and drinks are also available at various spots on campus, and provide for the conference goer who does not want a buffet meal. Alcoholic beverage consumption is common during the socializing times at the conference, and conferences host special designated "drinking" locations for the guests. The

larger conferences provide what is commonly referred to as the "beer garden", a grouping of tables and chairs set up outside with a tent or umbrellas shading customers from the summer sun. A bar, barbecue buffet, and, in one case, live musical entertainment, provide refreshment and a relaxing atmosphere in which to have a chat. Smaller conferences, given their more modest budgets, hold less extravagant get-togethers by providing a hospitality room where snacks and drinks are available after the evening sessions have ended. In addition to these types of set-ups where ongoing eating and drinking and socializing is taking place, there are numerous organized and unorganized parties being held, ranging from the formal President's Reception to the informal dorm room party. For example, the CSAA annually holds a lively evening of drinking and dancing known as the "Big Bash". On a smaller scale, a pub on campus frequented by graduate students epitomizes a more informal setting for drinking, a place that is somewhat removed from the more centralized conference activities.

The Conference Program

Conferences are action-packed, exhausting events. Programmed activities are scheduled virtually "back-to-back" and overlapping from early morning to late evening throughout the three or four days that the conference is in progress. It is not an easy task for most to "keep up the

pace" when it comes to attending all of the events that they would like to attend. One student aptly described the hurried nature of the conference when he said:

> *You go to a place like this and you know, I mean it is a real in and out...a real quick and dirty kind of thing (Interview #6).*

Other students commented on the nature of their interactions with others given the fast-paced conference schedule:

> *So sometimes things progress faster...than might normally be the case...you don't have ten years, you've got four days (Interview #5).*

> *I really feel in a sense that I didn't have enough time to interact with other people in a meaningful way. In other words there was lots of quick interactions, but not a lot of meaningful ones (Interview #22).*

Conference-goers usually organize their activities according to the schedule of events as they are outlined in a program booklet which is issued upon registration. Session topics, and the titles of papers to be presented in each session occupy most of the space in the booklet, and notices of special presentations or recreational events are interspersed between the session listings. Because there are only a few days in which to hold so many activities, there are always events taking place simultaneously. The time spent before, between and after sessions is time that is spent in a sense "refueling", taking a break from the formal academic focus of the setting, and socializing with others during eating and drinking occasions. Still, refueling times, although somewhat rejuvenating, do not

necessarily help the conferencing person find adequate quiet time for relaxation and sleep. Consequently, the conferencing experience is, in many ways, a tiring one.

The Graduate Student Role

In terms of the organizational hierarchy within the university academic social structure, graduate students are of a lower status than are the faculty members who hold professional positions. For the graduate student, attendance at a conference allows for professional and social interaction with these people who are the elite and who have achieved academic status. While such interactions are possible in this setting among individuals with differing formal role classifications, graduate students are still distanced from those of professional status by virtue of their student status.

In addition to the existence of formal role distinctions at conferences, informal status differences which are somewhat unique to the conference setting are evident among the graduate students. These "informal supplements to the formal role structure" (Lofland 1984, 80) are influenced by a number of factors, including for example, length of time in graduate school, university affiliation, paper presentation experience, and overall exposure to conferences. Generally speaking, the more experienced a graduate student is in conference attendance,

the more "in the know" and hence the higher status that person will be at a conference, in comparison to a less experienced student. It is evident that increased exposure to conferences, this often being commensurate with number of years in graduate school, assists the graduate student in taking the role of the professional, thereby preparing for life after graduate school. Conferences initially represent situations that lack clear definition for graduate students in the sense that they do not have a sure idea of how to act, or even of the range of ways in which to act (Lofland 1976, 52). Through successive exposures to conferences, graduate students come to more clearly define their roles in this setting, and as a result handle themselves with more assurance. For the most part, the more a graduate student is generally "in the know", the higher the status she/he is informally attributed.

Activities

The term "activities" points to the actual doing of things, or the "action" that is performed within the context of situations (Charon 1979). As Charon notes:

> The symbolic interactionist...divides up the stream of action and designates a beginning and an end of separate acts, for analytical purposes. Acts are viewed as performed in situations, with the individual defining goals, immediate or distant (1979, 113).

This section discusses activities at conferences as they have been organized into the following topical categories

(Lofland 1976, 49): 1) scheduling; 2) attending papers; 3) presenting papers; 4) socializing. Lofland makes the point that topical activities are in themselves strategies that people use in dealing with everyday life situations:

> Any act or more complex activity is a strategy to the degree that it is enacted to deal with a situation (1976, 49).

Notwithstanding the strategic aspects of these activities, the discussion here is aimed at providing descriptive information about a "day in the life" of the conferencing graduate student. An examination of graduate student strategies is found in the subsequent analysis in Chapters 7, 8, and 9.

Scheduling

Scheduling refers to the acts of selecting conference activities in which to participate, and of organizing these selections into a workable itinerary. It is through the practice of scheduling that a graduate student manages what is usually a significant portion of her/his time at the conference. As was noted in the discussion of the conference program, because conferences are such structured, activity-numerous events which encompass only a few days, "time" acquires the importance of being a valuable commodity. Consequently scheduling is a practice that usually involves careful deliberation on the part of the

graduate student, for there is no opportunity to "make up" for an activity that one wished to attend but missed.

Sessions, in at least a formal sense, constitute central activities for graduate students, activities around which other events are scheduled. The process of scheduling sessions is in itself complex in that it involves weighing a number of factors in order to arrive at a final plan of action. In developing an itinerary, a graduate student considers numerous aspects of the session, and their relevance to her/his personal goals. For example, a student may ponder: "Which session topics do I find interesting?"; "How does the topic relate to my area of specialization?" "Who is involved in the session?" (i.e., Are they "stars" or "nobodies"?); "Does the timing of this session conflict with the timing of another session that I would like to attend?"; "Where is the session?" "Who, if anybody, will I go with to the session?" This graduate student's account of how he goes about choosing sessions captures the nature of the internal process that guides scheduling:

> *So basically I guess you go according to what looks like it's well-organized, in whatever area it is, or that looks intellectually interesting...I sort of look through the program and think, "Oh that looks good", or I may know the people, I may have read some of their stuff, or I just like the way their titles are set up, it may sound like it might be interesting. After a while you can get a sense of who's doing serious stuff, and who isn't. Even from their titles you can guess (Interview #8).*

While their intentions may initially be to attend as many papers as possible, the importance of session attendance as a framework for the graduate student conference experience may diminish as a conference progresses. Such a decline in session attendance is understandable given the build-up of conference-related stresses on the student who is trying to "keep up" with the conference program. Over time, graduate students may opt for other, less formal activities and deviate from session scheduling that had initially been intended, choosing instead to socialize. Graduate student accounts suggest that overall, adherence to strictly-planned, conference schedules tends to become more relaxed as a conference-goer becomes more experienced in conferencing. First-time conference attenders, for example, often restrict their activities exclusively to the conference site itself, as this newcomer explained:

> *I know that other people were interested, and probably enjoyed and got a lot out of going downtown and doing some of the other things off campus. And I might enjoy that another year. But being my first year here, I was just really caught up in the conference happenings (Interview #22).*

A second-time conference attender offered insight into how his scheduling of activities had changed as his conference exposure increased:

> *I think it's kind of interesting from a... cultural point of view (how) in two years, after just going to one conference, I've.....developed a very different approach to conferences. Like I've sort of booked off in a planner when I'll be off*

campus, or when I'll sleep, like I don't have to go to every session, whereas in my first year, I thought, "Oh, I'll do this, I'll do this, I'll get this" and now, I'm a bit more relaxed about it and a bit more practical about it...I know that I need sleep, and I know that...I'm not going to get to Windsor very often, so I'd like to, you know, jog in the morning along the river and that sort of thing (Interview #19).

Attending Papers

By attending papers as members of an audience, graduate students gain exposure to perhaps one of the most recognized learning situations at the conference. A graduate student is either presenting a paper, or anticipating the day in which she/he will present a paper at a conference, and to witness paper presenters in action provides useful preparatory information. As part of the session audience, the student learns the norms inherent in the session situation, and the roles of the paper presenters, chairpeople, discussants, and audience. Some of the characteristics of the session activities deviate from what graduate students expect would be the case. For example, as a novice attender recently returned to academic pursuits, one of the most surprising occurrences experienced by the researcher was the professionals' common disregard of the time restrictions for their paper presentations:

> Professors can't keep to the deadlines - why? Don't they practise? Are they not used to time constraints as would be imposed in the field where sociology is applied? As professionals I would expect that they would (adhere to the time allotments) (field note 1987).

Also surprising to graduate students was their shared perception of last-minute preparation, or less-than-adequate attention to the "fine-tuning" of papers by professors. Criticisms of this nature were voiced at the graduate student Brown Bag Lunch, as recorded in the following field note:

> *One of the most discussed topics at the (Graduate Student) Brown Bag Lunch was their annoyance over what they believed was the profs' criticism of the quality of grad student papers. The room was divided on whether there were more grad students at the meetings than there were profs, but all agreed that the quality of student papers was generally higher than the quality of prof papers. Some talked of how profs would finish papers at "the last minute", for example on the plane enroute to the conference, or how they would never really finish a paper and just "bluff" their way through a presentation (field note 1988).*

During an interview, this graduate student expressed her feelings about the shoddy preparation of papers:

> *I know people who were still working on their papers yesterday and presented them in the afternoon...I think that's a real problem...Now some people...get away with it. The important people, the big names, I think it's been unenforceable and I'd like to see it enforced (Interview #12).*

An example of a less surprising session norm realized by graduate students is that of exiting a session only after it has finished, or between paper presentations. Leaving a session during a presentation is often noted by graduate students to be unacceptable behaviour. This experienced graduate student explained how he went about leaving a session when he found them uninteresting:

I won't get up and leave in the middle of someone's presentation, because that's really rude. I mean I think people have a right to be listened to to the end, as long as they keep within some time limit (Interview #8).

Sessions are exited for reasons other than boredom. Once scheduled, actualizing attendance at the papers of choice can lead to a hectic "juggling act" given that these might be dispersed among a number of different sessions. Such scattering contributes to the demands of an already tightly scheduled itinerary, as the following quotation from an experienced conferencing graduate student reveals:

Quite often what happens is that I'll be trying to go to two sessions at once, so I'll try to catch the first paper in one (session), and the second paper or third paper in another, and so it's planned that I'm doing that. Of course they don't always go in the order advertised, but...you have...four or five...or six sessions during the day, and there's like three or four of them you want to go to, and of course, they're all in the same hour, and so...you say, "Okay, I'm going to the first one here, and then I'll go to three buildings and up six floors and go to this one." There's a lot of jumping around (Interview #8).

Given the above notes on conference programs, the emphasis on scheduling, and the rigors of paper attendance, it is not surprising that audience members sometimes fall asleep during paper presentations. This experience was shared by more than one graduate student, and this researcher's note points to the commonality of "dozing off" while attending a paper:

I fell asleep at the afternoon session today. Others seemed to be sleeping too. I thought of how much more comfortable I felt because they were

sleeping, even though I didn't want the speaker to know I was bored (field note 1987).

Another graduate student noted that her feelings of boredom contributed to her sleeping during a paper presentation:

I actually fell asleep. (The paper) was so bad...I feel sadly ashamed but it was really a depressing statement. I mean he took great pains to explain every little thing to us...It got so bad, he was telling us why he was dotting his "i" (Interview #12).

Presenting Papers

Central to the activity of paper presenting are the feelings of anxiety for the presenter, and Chapter 9 addresses these aspects of the experience, and the coping strategies used by graduate students. A thorough discussion of the process of paper presenting would require an examination of the events that precede and succeed the on-site presentation of the paper in the session. Because this research is focused specifically on events as they occur within conference situations, the following discussion looks at the situated aspects of the act of paper presenting.

Paper presenting is symbolically meaningful to conference-going graduate students, for it marks the transition from what usually has been a somewhat passive to a more active role as conference participant. Because paper presenting is the norm among the professional population, paper presenting for graduate students symbolizes a step toward entry into the professional academic community. For

many graduate students, the presentation of a paper at a conference is the first time that she/he has "exposed" her/himself to an academic community outside of her/his home school. Therefore, paper presenting by graduate students constitutes a form of "initiation ritual" (Napier and Gershenfeld 1981, 508). The importance of this act is demonstrated by the sense, or the "unwritten expectation" among graduate students that conference goers should have presented a paper at least by the time they have attended their second conference. This observation is corroborated by the researcher's experience as a passive participant at four conferences, and peripherally active involvement in two of those conferences as an administrative organizer. Not having presented a paper at any of these conferences results in feelings of academic inadequacy, a sense of not having done all that an aspiring graduate student should have done.

Paper presenters face uncertainty prior to their performance in a session. The presence or absence of an audience in the session can each present unnerving circumstances for the graduate student. On the one hand, the absence of an audience, or the presence of a very small audience may be perceived as appealing in that one does not have to cope with the nervousness that is usually sparked by the presence of a large crowd. At the same time, to have a poor turnout of people in the audience signifies for the presenter and those who are present the fact that the

presenter and/or topic are seen as being neither interesting nor important enough to draw an audience. Such a perception can be disheartening for the graduate student presenter who is probably already feeling unsure and/or intimidated because of her/his low status position. One graduate student laughingly told of arriving at a session, ready to present his paper, thinking that the session was to begin at 9:00 a.m., when in fact it was scheduled to start at 9:15 a.m. The way he told the story revealed that the "absence" of an audience was not so funny at the time:

> *It was a "big turnout"...I thought we were supposed to start at nine...and it's nine o'clock, and (two other people) were there...and I'm looking around thinking, "Okay, well if nobody comes, I'm not saying anything"...so I said, "You know, I kind of thought somebody'd be here by nine o'clock," and they said, "No, it doesn't start 'til nine-fifteen" (Interview #10).*

The response of the Chairperson and the Discussant is of crucial importance to the paper presenter, and again represents an area of uncertainty. How these individuals introduce and respond to what the paper presenter has been saying either reinforces or discredits the presentation, and most graduate students do not find out the nature of these comments until the session itself. In the following example, a graduate student tells of how she felt supported by her Chairperson who also happened to be her discussant. In reference to the Chairperson's presence beside her, the graduate student said:

He gave me a good feeling...He seemed really knowledgeable in his area, so if someone is going to ask me something that I would not be able to respond to, I would have been able to say, "What do you think is a good example?" and he'd jump in (Interview #11).

A more experienced graduate student tells of a paper presenting experience which left him feeling abused and intimidated because of the response of his discussant:

The thing that didn't help this time was that in my actual session, the discussant was very hard on me, so that was early on that I had kind of rough treatment at the hand of the discussant, and then after that, that made it a little bit harder to speak out in other sessions (Interview #14).

As has been mentioned previously, the tightly-scheduled nature of conferences, and the disregard of time restrictions by paper presenters can, in combination, create very uncomfortable situations for paper presenting graduate students. It is not uncommon for a situation to arise wherein a graduate student finds her/himself without as much time to present as anticipated because a previous presenter(s) has talked on at the expense of her/his allotted twenty or twenty-five minutes. In such instances, graduate students must decide whether to infringe upon the subsequent presenter's time, (thereby also challenging the Chairperson), or shorten the presentation to accommodate the session schedule. Given their positions of low status, such decisions can be very difficult for graduate students who are struggling to create positive impressions through both academic presentations and interpersonal techniques.

Socializing

As was mentioned in the discussion of the conference program, much of the time spent between sessions involves interacting with others at the conference. Because sessions can have a very draining effect on conference attenders, this "break" time, although it can also involve academic discussion, often is characterized by other topics of conversation and other activities. This graduate student, attending her first conference, speaks of what her time between sessions was like:

> *Many times when I met with other people...I... went off and came in here for a beer, or went to a wine and cheese...and we would discuss the sessions we had been in, but we really didn't get into it very deep...and I think the reason why I didn't want to do it was because they'd just had too much...After sitting in sessions all day, I'd had enough, I didn't want to talk about that sort of stuff any more (Interview #22).*

Eating and drinking occasions signify important socializing times for people, times when old acquaintances re-unite, and new contacts are made. Because of their exposure to these social occasions, graduate students must decide how often to indulge in eating and drinking activities as part of the social encounter, and how much food and beverage to consume at each. Budget constraints may allow for only limited involvement in organized conference-related eating occasions for example, because it is usually more expensive to eat at these places than it

would be to eat at some places off campus, or to buy less costly "snack" foods. Notwithstanding the costs, because of the likelihood of making new contacts at conference-arranged eating spots, graduate students do sometimes make the financial sacrifices required to attend at least some of these meals. At the smaller-scale conferences for example, meals can be purchased in advance as part of the accommodation package, and these meals are well-attended by conference participants, particularly faculty members who can afford them. Therefore, eating places symbolize "action spots" for graduate students. Even though a graduate student may not be hungry, she/he may still attend the dining hall in order to get involved in social encounters. The following field note illustrates the researcher's unease in being present at a conference meal for reasons other than gaining nourishment. The researcher had been pressured to attend by a mentor (L.M.) who stressed the importance of "meeting the professionals" at all social engagements:

> *L.M. made me go to lunch today, even though I was still stuffed from breakfast, and didn't pay for lunch. It was really embarrassing making arrangements to get into the dining hall without paying, and (the conference organizer) had to speak with the chefs, tell them I wouldn't be eating etc. so that I could get in. If the meal hadn't cost $15.00 I would have paid it, just so as not to draw attention to myself! Not only was I my usual up-tight self in trying to mingle, but the situation was worse because I felt as if my reasons for being there were too obvious, because I wasn't eating and drinking like everybody else! (field note, 1987)*

As with occasions that are primarily centered around eating, occasions involving the consumption of alcoholic beverages represent popular social occasions for graduate students. The decision-making process surrounding drinking activities is similar to the process surrounding eating activities. Graduate students are often limited in the amount of drinking that they do by virtue of the fact that they are typically on a restrictive budget. Still, graduate students will often spend money that could be spent on food, on alcohol instead, as having a fun time partying can become more of a priority when one feels, in a sense, as if one were "on holiday". Also, because drinking places are important action spots for social encounters, graduate students are likely to be found there, whether or not they are drinking.

In summary, this discussion of the structural and processual aspects of conferences has provided a backdrop for the purpose of taking a closer look at the multiple involvements of graduate students at conferences. The conference setting is designed to cater to the needs of the participants during their brief stay. The conference program is scheduled so that many activities occur within a brief time frame. Graduate students occupy a low status within the formal hierarchy, and occupy various informal status positions within their own peer group. Conference participants engage in a variety of activities and these

have been grouped according to the descriptive headings of: scheduling; attending papers; presenting papers; and socializing. The next chapter outlines two graduate student typologies that emerged during the course of the data analysis.

CHAPTER 6

TYPOLOGIES

In keeping with the informal status hierarchy among graduate students noted in Chapter 5, patterns related to the extent of conference experience emerged through the data analysis process. Similarly, the data analysis revealed patterning with regard to the strategies used by the graduate students in dealing with conference situations. These consistencies, or "disciplined abstractions", as explained by Lofland, represent "the generic and generalized types and aspects of situations and strategies that emerge from personal immersion in concrete, qualitative data and remain adequately grounded in such data in written reports" (1976, 62). It was through disciplined abstractions, that these two typologies emerged: 1) a typology relating to the informal status hierarchy which is based on degree of conference experience; 2) a typology relating to the interactive strategies used by graduate students. It is useful to discuss the characteristics of the types within each typology as a prelude to an examination of the various strategies and tactics utilized by these types of graduate students. It should be noted that these typologies were developed through the process of analysis of the activities and strategies used by the graduate students.

Conference Experience

With regard to the typology relating to extent of conference exposure, ranging from the non-experienced to the very experienced graduate students, the following types were identified: "Neophytes"; "New Pros"; and "Veterans".

Neophytes

Neophytes are graduate students that are attending a conference for the first time, and whose experiences therefore constitute mainly first impressions of the conferencing process. In comparison to the more experienced types, neophytes are especially aware of their lower status as graduate students. They accept the noticeable distinction between their lower status and the higher status of the professionals. This "lowest of the lows" status within both the formal and informal role structure is reinforced because of the presence of "big name" professionals whose name they may have heard before, whose theory they may have learned, or whose book they may have read. The possibility of observing, meeting or even conversing with a "big name" is typically exciting for neophytes who take on the role of "fans". For them to actually be in the presence of a "star" can result in any number of impressions ranging from awestruck to disillusioned. Neophytes also seem to experience more excitement at the conference than do the other graduate

students because of the novelty of the situation. They usually spend the majority of their time on campus doing activities that are directly conference-related. They are likely to be influenced by the advice of other graduate students or professionals when it comes to planning their own conference itineraries. They appear awed by the intellectual goings-on in the sessions and during social times, and they perceive the practice of intellectual exchange as being the focus of the conferencing process. They view conferences as a way in which to get to know people what people outside of their own schools are like, although they are vague as to why such exposure is important.

New Pros

New Pros are graduate students that have attended at least one conference previously, but who are still relatively "green" in comparison to the truly seasoned conference attenders. They indicate a closer identification to the professional identity of "sociologist" even though, like the Neophytes, they are formally of a lower status than the professionals. In terms of their perceptions of their formal lower status, they tend to experience ambivalent feelings with regard to the acceptance of this status. At times they profess a feeling of equal status with the professionals, while at other times they cast themselves as

affiliated with the lower, subservient status. In effect this "identity crisis" is a prominent focus for New Pros who are often intent on evaluating whether they will fit and whether they want to fit into the community of professional academics. Assuming that they feel they are able to, and want to fit, New Pros become concerned with the way in which they will fit. In other words, they assess academic types in an attempt to construct the type which they would like to model themselves after. It is not surprising then that New Pros attend mostly sessions which are in their area of specialty. They use conferences as a way in which to establish a reputation outside of their own schools, for they have the notion that this strategy will bring eventual rewards as they progress beyond graduate school.

Veterans

Seasoned conference attenders, or "Veterans" have attended at least four or five conferences in the past. They frequently identify themselves as "sociologists", revealing their perception of faculty as peers and their rejection of their formalized lower status as graduate students. In some cases, Veterans even cast themselves as being superior in status to the professionals, and refer to their more recent involvement in formalized learning as justification for such a distinction. Veterans perceive both graduate students and professionals as career serious

as opposed to intellectual serious, and they see this orientation as being "not too encouraging" (Interview #8). Compared to Neophytes and New Pros, they are best able to specify for what reasons and in what ways they want to gain exposure to other people through conference involvement. Therefore they have the most clearly defined plans surrounding their conference attendance, job-hunting being their immediate priority. Because of the presence of so many potential employers, they are actively focused on "looking good" for the job market. They talk more about being aware of the inner workings of departmental politics, and they recognize the need for diversity in session attendance in order to establish a reputation outside of just one area of specialty.

Interactive Styles

With regard to the second typology which relates to interactive styles among graduate students, the following types emerged: "Voyeurs"; "Showpeople"; and "Salespeople".

Voyeurs

Voyeurs are those individuals at a conference who are the least "outgoing" in terms of their style of interaction. They appear hesitant to draw attention to themselves, and are unlikely to present a paper at the conference. These are the people who choose to remain on the periphery of

ongoing interactions, in the sense that they do not vocally participate in discussions. In this way, they appear to be passive participants, whose approach is to observe what is going on without making a personal contribution.

Showpeople

Unlike Voyeurs, Showpeople present themselves as extroverted participants in interaction. They appear confident of themselves, and are actively involved in interaction with others regardless of the conference activity. They do not fear drawing attention to themselves, and most likely are presenting a paper during a conference. They are seen venturing questions in sessions, and voicing opinions during informal conversations. They impress as being gregarious conference participants who want to "get their two cents in" during any interactive situation.

Salespeople

Like Showpeople, Salespeople present as being confident of themselves in terms of their ability to actively engage in interaction in any conference situation. They differ from Showpeople in that they seem more selective in terms of where, when, how and with whom they will interact. This discretion is due to the fact that Salespeople are more specifically goal-oriented in their interactions than are the other two types. Therefore, given their discerning

nature, Salespeople fluctuate between a Voyeur state and Showperson state depending on the usefulness of the interaction to them.

The two typologies in this chapter are based on extent of graduate students' exposure to conferences, and on their interactive styles. How these typologies relate to each other is a topic that is pursued in Chapter 10. In the next three analysis chapters, the "Neophyte", "New Pro", and "Veteran" labels will be used in the discussion of graduate student perspectives, strategies and role tactics.

CHAPTER 7

GETTING AHEAD - IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Getting Ahead

Those graduate students who do attend professional conferences perceive, or have been led to think that conference attendance constitutes an important component of their graduate experience and that a conference serves as an event which has the potential to benefit them in their future academic or career pursuits. Discussions with them revealed their common striving toward the goal of "getting ahead" in the academic world, and conference involvement is viewed as one of many components that can help bring about that goal. Such involvement, it is taken for granted, can only be advantageous if a graduate student is successful in creating a positive impression at the conference. In trying to understand the process of impression management in the graduate student experience, an important factor that emerges is that, when compared to the professionals, graduate students are lower status participants. Neophytes and New Pros, in contrast to more seasoned conference-goers, tend to emphasize their awareness of their lower status in the conference setting. This New Pro, for example, expresses her hesitancy to speak out and draw attention to herself given her lower "credentials" as a graduate student:

> *It is difficult sometimes, especially when the people who are carrying on the discussion are either extremely well-informed, or extremely*

passionate about the issue, where I'm wary as a graduate student to intervene. Not because I don't think I would be taken seriously, but because I don't feel I have the confidence to really articulate coherent positions in the argument (Interview #2).

This Veteran recalls his feelings as a Neophyte and notes a change that took place in his experience soon after his initial exposure to conferences:

I think the first one I was a little over-awed initially, 'cause of all these, you know, these are important people, these are big-league sociologists...and I quickly lost that sense...Took about a day (Interview #10).

This Veteran laughingly noted how he had experienced a change in his perception of the professionals during his years of conference attendance:

Yea, there's all those kinds of hidden pressures, you know, meeting these people who you think are gods, or demi-gods, and then discovering that they're really ordinary (Interview #15).

These feelings of being set apart from the professionals sometimes persist for graduate students even after they have become Veterans:

I still feel largely like I'm kind of on the outside watching the Big Guns do their thing, and you know, I mean I'll just sit back a bit, although it is a little different with the Learneds this time (Interview #17).

Another Veteran expressed similar feelings:

We always have the feeling that we are very inferior being a student, being not well known (Interview #3).

The impression management strategies utilized by graduate students in their attempts to "get ahead" emerged

into three stages which seem to be, for the most part, universal among conference-going graduate students: (1) "learning the ropes" through watching and listening; (2) becoming recognized through doing performances and initiating interaction; and (3) marketing oneself through "politicking." This chapter explores the graduate students' experiences during these stages, the strategies that they use to deal with their experiences, and some of the prominent tactics that are employed.

"Learning the Ropes": Watching and Listening

It may seem commonsensical to say that all graduate students engage in watching and listening during their conscious hours of conference attendance. These activities, however, are taken more for granted by some graduate students than they are by others. Typically Neophytes perceive watching and listening as being main activities in themselves, whereas the more seasoned attenders view them as being relatively unconscious activities which occur simultaneous to whatever else it is that they may be doing at the time. Through these focused activities, the Neophyte, who is unfamiliar with what is going on, gathers information about the conferencing process. Because conferences present as ambiguous situations for Neophytes, such information is essential in that it provides a guide by which the student can model her/his behaviour. Being

conscious of their lower status in the social structure at conferences contributes to Neophytes' hesitancy, or refusal to draw attention to themselves prematurely (i.e. before they feel they have learned enough through watching and listening). Therefore, watching and listening is an information-gathering tactic performed by Neophytes usually before they expose themselves to other impression management tactics that would make them either more visible, or the "centre of attention". Watching and listening then are seen as being fundamental tactics which "pave the way" for other impression management tactics. The following disclosures from one graduate student during the course of her interview refer to this aspect of the Neophyte experience:

> *Yea, so I tend to be a little shy, and I hate presenting anything, so this is my first one, I'm only here observing, I'm not giving any papers or anything like that (Interview #7).*
>
> *So the reason I'm here is because I know that eventually and next year in Quebec I'm going to give a paper a month before somewhere else, and I just want to see what's going on (Interview #7).*
>
> *I just wanted to see, like this is...it's exploratory...I have friends who are here in sort of, you know, the second and third time, and they want to make contacts, they want to meet certain people, you know, because they've been there and they know what to expect and they've decided, "Well, this is the time I'm going to go in and make contacts," but I'm not interested right now, I mean I'd like to, but I'm just trying to see what the atmosphere is like, what people are doing, what you're supposed to be doing, I mean even the little things like um, it's one thing we remarked, is that people are dressed up, I mean at university we wear jeans, we don't get dressed up. It's just little things like finding out that if*

you're going to present a paper, don't come in your jeans, right?.(Interview #7)

Another Neophyte voiced the same intentions:

I just want to see what's going on, I just want to see these people and see who they are, and what they're like, you know, and see what sociologists look like, other than what I'm used to...I'm not at the stage where I'm ready to say, "Well, here's my work, here I am, what do you think of me?" That's later (Interview #22).

This New Pro, having been to three conferences, tells of deliberating over whether to move beyond the watching and listening stage, for to do so, he fears, may result in the creation of a negative impression:

I wanted to ask a question...but I didn't think that I knew enough...to ask an intelligent question, so I felt a little intimidated by some of the other Ph.D.'s...I'm only a lowly M.A. student, and some of the Ph.D.'s that were firing the questions out, and put it forth so academically. So no, I don't want to ask him, you know, I just had a question of curiosity and I didn't want to ask it (Interview #18).

Involved in this general process of watching and listening is the process of sizing-up certain professionals to get a sense of what they're about. This practise was referred to as "star gazing" by the following Neophyte:

I'm at the star-gazer stage. I just want to look, I don't need to be noticed (Interview #7).

Star gazing enables graduate students to put "a face to a name", a process that was reported by all types of conference-going graduate students. By acquiring an in-person impression of a star, a graduate student is then better able to grasp the nature of the role of the

professional, and use this information in the process of role taking and role making. Most graduate students cited this "face to name" process as being an important and exciting episode:

> *I mean one of the reasons people are here, you know, they spend all year reading journals and reading monographs of peoples' works, and although you may interact that way intellectually, I mean you don't see these people, you don't see what they look like, and you want to make an impression. It's not as important what they look like, but it's still part of the package (Interview #7).*

> *All the big shots were there, and it was, it was, pardon the expression, it was orgasmic, to see people who I've only read about for these past five years (Interview #13).*

> *It's nice if you can just see them once in a while, this figure standing there and you think, "Bingo!" (Interview #6)*

> *It's great also to put...a face to a name...and, even in a couple of places, you know how in journals they don't always use the first name, they just use the initials, but sometimes you don't know whether it's male or female, and you know, but it's nice to make those connections and putting an age to a person also puts a lot of information in terms of the way they think and that kind of thing, so I found that really useful (Interview #1).*

Many times graduate students are surprised when their in-person impression of the star is incongruent with the image that they had constructed. Often the incongruencies relate to the star's age, style of dress, and body size. In the following quote, a New Pro reflects on her rather shocking experience when she finally got to meet who was perhaps her most "shining" star at her first conference:

I was all geared-up to meet him because he'd done this down-to-earth stuff that I thought was so neat, so interesting, and I pictured this long-haired hippy, you know...He turned out to be the straightest, most conservative guy, in a suit and tie, and really drab colours...short hair, and very religious, he was just totally the opposite! (Interview #25)

Another New Pro was most surprised by the age of her star:

She's well, you know, like she's older, I mean I've read most of her work and recently like in the past year, and if you ever read her stuff, she talks about her experiences...when she was much younger. She had young, very, very young children, and she was just starting out her professional tour, so you're talking about somebody that's thirty...and that's what she writes about because those are the ideas that she needs to do whatever she has to do, but that's the impression you get. And you picture this young woman with little kids, and that's who you're talking to in her monographs or in her journal articles, and then you meet her, and you realize that she's a nice lady, but I mean you realize that she's not this young person that she was when she was talking about these things (Interview #7).

The surprise which arises from putting a face to a name can also relate to the interpersonal characteristics of a star which are incongruent with the graduate student's idealized image of what that star would be like in terms of professionalism, intellectual seriousness, or academic ambience. One Veteran spoke of this realization:

A lot of academics are really a let down, a lot of social misfits who have this academic image constructed. You know, it's like finding out that a lot of cops beat their wives, and shit...that blows the image of this really straight (academic) (Interview #5).

A Veteran expressed her dismay in discovering that one of

her stars had turned out to be less than a shining example of the professional academic that she had envisioned:

> *I mean he was so intimidating, I thought "What a big-mouth jerk!" you know? And he was. I mean he was well-published, sure, and he's got a lot of good stuff, but I mean, for the most part as an individual he's a big-mouth blow-hard, you know? He's a bully. He's a bully...For all his publications I thought that this was going to be an academic, you know? But he's a jerk (Interview #24).*

Star gazing also serves to inform the graduate student as to the approachability of the professional. Getting a sense of whether a professional is likely to be open to your efforts to make contact is crucial for venturing impression management strategies which follow from watching and listening. This New Pro discusses the aspect of approachability by contrasting one type of professional with another:

> *I talked to him a little bit after the end of his (paper) but he's, you know, a really nice person, and you know that he's an approachable person, whereas another person could get up there, present their paper in a very academic fashion and not seem to be that dramatic or enthused about the research. And then, well, I'm interested in it, but I don't go and approach them or nothing, you can get that type of impression of a person (Interview #18).*

A Veteran similarly talks of "reading" a person's openness to being approached:

> *There are certain people who's air, the aura that they present is one of impermeability. I'm not going to, you know, risk my ego, and go up to someone who clearly portrays this aura of 'I'm clearly too important to speak to anybody else.' No! Forget that. They're not worth my time (Interview #16).*

Name tags also play an important part in the process of determining who to approach, as is recognized by this foreign-student Veteran:

> *First I will of course read your front with everyone's name, and without their knowledge I will just, you know, if I sit beside you, or I will stand and have a coffee somewhere. I'll just look up the name tag (and)...if the name is familiar...I will introduce myself and I will talk about my other research interests and focus on what I did...if I admire them, or have an appreciation for them for any kind of work they do ...and if the personality is not really pleasant, (and)...only the subject area is of interest to me, I don't. By talking to somebody else, or by the way they look, I can easily understand (Interview #4).*

Becoming Recognized: Doing Performances and Initiating Interaction

Graduate students recognize that, in order to get ahead, it is essential to establish a reputation during the conferencing process. In order to establish a reputation, a graduate student must go beyond the information-gathering process of watching and listening to the process of becoming recognized as a unique,individual who has a separate identity. The majority of graduate students then, in a sense, see a need for, and strive to undergo a transformation from invisible to visible person within a particular academic circle or community. A New Pro discusses the importance of making this transition:

> *If you don't have an identity, you're not a significant object in their field at all. And if you're not a significant object, it's much less*

likely that they'll take you into account, or that they'll have any consideration for something that's important to you (Interview #10).

Graduate students report using a number of role tactics for the purpose of establishing reputations, tactics which are often learned through watching and listening to other graduate students and professionals. This Ph.D. student, who had formerly been a public school teacher, spoke of using the conference setting to learn how to change her identity and her reputation from that of teacher to that of researcher. Her comments reflect her concern about establishing a reputation that would be in keeping with the role requirements of a researcher:

I no longer feel like a teacher, but I don't feel like a college professor as I would like to be. I feel betwixt and between...I want to go into research, and I don't know if I quite fit there. So part of it was to see, how do I fit?...How do professors talk to each other? What are they interested in? How do they phrase the questions? I tend to phrase the questions as a teacher, rather than as a researcher (Interview #9).

A New Pro, in discussing a prior conference, described his intention to establish a reputation with a particular group of sociologists:

I went with the expectation that I would get to know that group of people, that I would sort of ingratiate myself into that collectivity, and that I would start to become a known person (Interview #10).

"Hanging with the 'right' people" assists graduate students in the establishment of reputations, in that associating socially with a recognizable group results in the group's

identity being attributed to the individual graduate student. A Veteran makes this point:

> *And if you sit with the feminists, and you can integrate socially...independent of whether your work is more or less into it, you can become seen as sympathetic, as socialist maybe, whether you are or you're not...so who you socialize with is important, it identifies you (Interview #5).*

Many graduate students spoke of the importance of impression management in establishing a reputation as a preparatory measure for the career world of academia. This Neophyte, although somewhat uncertain as to the eventual payoff from establishing a reputation, speaks of her intention to do so nonetheless:

> *I think we have to be realistic...You have to make your name known if you're looking for an academic career...I don't know about that, I don't know if it's going to help...but it might help (Interview #11).*

This New Pro describes a very purposeful approach to the establishment of his reputation as a means to eventual employment:

> *One of the things as a graduate student coming to these conferences is...I'm scouting the terrain, and I'm laying, I'm doing the spade work and the pre-garden, pre-garden planting of the career that I'm going to have as a sociologist...As I'm working as a sociologist, I'm going to have a relationship with these people, they're going to be having their part of the field. In terms of being a sociologist you've got to get along, right? You've gotta fit in, and you have to have an identity within that organization or within that grouping. If you're nobody, if you don't have any sort of social identity with them, if you don't have any place in the way things are going...I mean, you don't have to be the star, you don't have to be the centre of attention, but you have to be somebody, you have to have an identity*

> within that collectivity, because if they don't know who you are, you're nothing. You may be the most brilliant person in the universe...but if they don't know who you are, they're not going to listen to you 'cause, you know, it's just noise if you're not somebody (Interview #6).

Reputations are being established, impressions constantly being managed whether encounters are between those who have previously established relationships or between strangers. Graduate students, because of their relative newness on the scene, are often in situations where they're meeting people for the first time. Given the importance of first impressions, they carefully handle the ways in which they lead up to, and carry through with meeting other conference-goers. Sometimes graduate students will make attempts to establish a reputation by "performing" in front of an audience in a session situation. For example, when asked how he went about establishing an identity at a conference, this New Pro explained one of the tactics:

> *When you're in a session for example, if you can ask an intelligent question, (people will think), "Well there's a perceptive person," and...that's one way of standing out from everybody else (Interview #6).*

The importance of knowing how to ask a question was a recurring theme in conversations with graduate students. Question-asking by graduate students in a session is often the tactic used initially in the process of establishing a reputation. In this way, graduate students draw attention to themselves as a prelude to eventual, more personal

interaction. This New Pro recalls his efforts as a Neophyte to prepare an intelligent question during a session where many of his stars were presenting:

> *And I remember sitting there thinking, and I'm listening to these people talk, and they're giving their sessions, and I'm listening, I'm listening intently to what they're saying so that I can ask an intelligent question, because I don't want to feel like an idiot when I ask a question...but I felt that I wanted to have a question ready... because it's one of the ways to initiate interaction. It's one of the ways that you're known (Interview #10).*

A Veteran reminisces about her first conference experience when after having asked a question in a session, she met a new person:

> *I felt far more isolated (then) because I only knew the few people who I had already known...and I leaned on them to give me, you know, connections...The first day I sort of travelled on my own...The second day, I went to a session where I got up the courage to open my mouth. And afterwards, someone came up to me and did precisely this, said: "You know, I was really interested in your question, it sounds like you're doing, or into things that are similar to what I'm into. Can we go for coffee and talk?"...And we sat, and we had coffee, and she said, "Oh, you know, someone else...," and I said, "Oh, someone else...," So I introduced her, she introduced me, and the network starts (Interview #16).*

The session setting also provides the forum for graduate students to present papers, another very important tactic used in order to work towards establishing a reputation which suggests some credibility when trying to get published. This Veteran valued the CSAA meetings as a place from which he could "launch" his publication record:

There is some validity when you send a paper in for publication and say, "First presented at a conference," so they'll say, "It's not totally out to lunch." (Interview #13)

By becoming involved in the sessions in a more formal capacity, (by presenting papers, or acting as Chair or Discussant), a graduate student in a sense "enters the spotlight". It is during these performances that a student's impression management strategies come under perhaps the closest scrutiny. A common theme among graduate students in discussing such situations was the importance that they placed on presenting themselves as organized individuals who were well prepared for their formal role, and who were compliant with conference deadlines in general. A Veteran relayed a story about other graduate students in her department who, never having attended a conference before, perceived conference deadlines as being in a sense "carved in stone". As the Veteran explained, these soon-to-be Neophytes did not understand that more seasoned attenders often treated deadlines as if they were supposed to be broken:

The travel grant forms came in the day after you were supposed to have applied...People came running into my office, "What do we do? It's beyond the deadline, I can't afford all this money!" and I said, "That's stupid, don't worry about it...Don't worry, the deadlines don't... really mean anything anyway. Most people don't apply until after the deadline has passed." (Interview #16)

In addition to trying to meet deadlines, enforcing deadlines was an impression management tactic used by this

New Pro in her role as Chairperson. Her interpretation of the time restrictions influenced her relentless enforcement of the deadlines:

> *I was a very tough Chair they told me...I sent her a note saying five more minutes, she took her five minutes and a bit more, and I cut her off...we had a schedule. We had other people who were waiting to present, and if I gave her that much time, I'd have to give everybody. I wasn't buying into that (Interview #12).*

As paper presenters, graduate students are more likely to keep within the allotted time allowances as a tactic for creating a positive impression (field notes, 1987). Some also reported rehearsing for their presentations as it is through a well-organized presentation that one can, as this foreign-student Veteran stated, *"compensate"* for not having *"a good name in the area" (Interview #4).* She discussed her tactic:

> *I spend rehearsals Sunday, rehearsals, rehearsals, and rehearsals before I go to the presentation... Sometimes in front of my husband at home, and then after coming to the conference I do on my own... and I (watch) the watch (to see) whether I can finish on time. And I will also suppose that there are some audiences, even if there is not...I normally do five to six rehearsals before I go (Interview #4).*

A New Pro related her efforts to prepare herself for her role as discussant by doing extensive background reading as a tactic, because, as she explained:

> *My biggest concern was that perhaps I didn't know the literature enough to do an informed discussion, and that was important for me (Interview #12).*

The same New Pro, with pride, elaborated on her organizational tactics prior to the conference:

> *I'm very organized, I have my discussion written. So I guess I had it written, oh, a week ago, and then I typed it into the computer, printed it out, edited it, rewrote it, so it was ready, in form, in the folder, in my briefcase...(three days before the conference) (Interview #12).*

Strategically placing oneself in the room, for the purpose of "watching the clock" was the organizational tactic used by this Veteran in his attempt to not exceed the time limit:

> *Today I barely got through. And the benefit was that the clock was straight in front of me today...so I could see how much time I had. (I tried) to govern the flow of what I was saying and make sure that I got close to the end before the time ran out...So actually, if any recommendations would apply, the wall you face is the wall with the clock (Interview #5).*

In addition to creating a positive impression through performances in front of somewhat larger groups of people, graduate students also establish reputations through more personal means by making one-on-one contacts with professionals. As with the aforementioned tactics, it is through the watching and listening process that a graduate student learns this approach. A Neophyte, on the first day of the conference, admits to her ignorance as to how to go about meeting new people:

> *(I want)...to associate with other people, (but) I don't know how...I think it is important, but I'm not sure how to do it (Interview #7).*

Later in the conference, the interviewer introduced this same Neophyte to other graduate students and her discussant at the main social event, the Big Bash. Meeting others through introduction by a pre-established relationship is perhaps a helpful tactic in that it is one that does not place all of the responsibility for initiating interaction on the graduate student. This same Neophyte, during a second interview, thanked the interviewer for having made the introduction before the date of her paper presentation as it made her feel more comfortable in the session:

> *I had a good feeling. The fact that I talked to (my discussant) yesterday was a really good thing (Interview #11).*

Other graduate students also referred to having met new people through introductions prompted by individuals known to them. According to one Veteran:

> *The biggest way in which you meet new people is through people you already know (Interview #8).*

The researcher's notes show a similar experience:

> *I met the vast majority of people at the conference as a result of introductions initiated by my thesis advisor, who had orchestrated my getting to the conference. Given my shy nature and feelings of intimidation in the company of academic strangers, I do not think that I would have met any of these individuals if it had not been for her introducing me (field note 1987).*

These accounts suggest that the introduction-initiated interactions usually come about in social situations. As noted by this Veteran:

> *So, quite often as you probably know...what academics think of as socializing is to go out to*

dinner together after at the end of the day. That's quite often one way you meet people... through people you know who know them, and then you go out to dinner together and maybe have a couple of drinks together, and then maybe you might, after a couple of drinks or whatever, you might actually start to get to know people a bit (Interview #5).

Another New Pro tells of a party at a graduate student conference that enabled graduate students to meet one another:

We were just sort of introduced to each other, and what do they do, and where were they, and where were they in their programs...I guess it was sort of an attempt at networking (Interview #12).

Meeting new people through established contacts is a universal tactic at conferences. For those who are at the stage of reputation formation, social networks usually centre around those known through the home university. As a graduate student's conference experience increases, so too does her/his social network, as is discussed in the following section entitled "Marketing Oneself: 'Politicking'". One Neophyte described how she began her social network and how it took shape after she arrived at the CSAA meetings by herself and not knowing anyone:

I was uneasy...the first day, until there was a wine and cheese, the Women's Caucus Wine and Cheese, and then I just went over there and started talking to people that I had seen in the sessions...I mean, you know, you just talk to one person, then she would introduce me to somebody else, and so on and so forth (Interview #7).

Another neophyte graduate student, excited by the success of her networking experience, tells of overcoming the obstacle

of being an outsider of a group of graduate students who "stuck together". They were from the university where she soon would go to do her Ph.D., and she wanted to establish contact with graduate students from that university:

> *There was another student who was going to be studying at (the same university) who I met here. It was a real networking thing. Somebody else introduced me because they knew he was going to go to (that university)...So then I met him and I said, "I haven't been able to find anybody from (that university), is there anybody here?"...So then he introduced me. And it was really (a) neat networking experience (Interview #22).*

Other graduate students use the tactic of loitering after a session in order to initiate contact with a star who has presented a paper. A Neophyte described this approach:

> *I'll go to the sessions in which they present, and then I'll hang around afterwards...(I) just follow people who go to the front of the class...You just, you listen, I mean just like you do in class when you want to talk to the professor when you're a first, a new student or something, you just bed yourself in them, and hey, when the opportunity arises, somebody's talking about a topic you're familiar with or what not, open your mouth and...if you're not shy and you're outgoing, then you may dominate the conversation and have a totally different image of this situation...I usually do stand back and wait until somebody says something that is nearer to my specialization, my area of interest and I...(say something) intellectual...I'm talking academics (Interview #7).*

Most often graduate students comment on, or ask a question about a paper the professional has given when initiating interaction through the loitering approach. Such questions or comments often begin with flattering statements as this Veteran's quote suggests:

You need to have something to talk about, but particularly after a session where they've given a paper, that's a good pretext, and you say, "Well look I'm interested in what you have to say." (Interview #15)

Saying something that relates to a professional's paper as a means of initiating interaction is a tactic used apart from the loitering situation as well. A New Pro discusses how this tactic is used generally in an attempt to create a favourable and memorable impression.

Very often one of the ways to start conversations with people you're interested in is to say, "I liked your paper," you know, "Tell me a little bit more about this," or "I like your paper, it reminded me of that." You know, you use the fact that they've presented...as a bridge or as an introduction to talk with them about whatever... Now if you can go up and make, if you can go up to them and make...intelligent conversation...about whatever it was they talked about, or whatever it was you wanted to talk about, you don't have to be an authority, you don't have to be an expert, you just need to not sound like you've got your head up your ass. So you need to sound like you have at least some idea of what's going on, and even if you don't have the answers, you can at least ask the questions. Like when you're talking to somebody, and you know, whatever they're talking about, you can ask them questions so that you show that you at least have some grasp of it...they're much more likely to recognize you (Interview #6).

Many students referred to establishing a common ground as a tactic for initiating interaction. Upon approaching a professional, the graduate student conveys the message that she/he shares the professional's interests, or is pursuing the same area of study, and would be grateful to the professional for her/his expertise on a particular issue. In these cases the student takes on the role of "fan" in an

attempt to positively impress the "star". A Veteran describes this tactic:

> *When I was at one of the sessions, I certainly made eye contact with the person who was talking several times, and I'm sure that she knew while I was sitting there that I was definitely...very much interested in what she was saying. So when I went out afterwards and I said "I thought it was great, I wish I had such an experience. I'm interested in that kind of thing. Could we meet later?" her response was, "Yes." (Interview #9)*

This Veteran, uses the same tactic of establishing common ground for the express purpose of seeking out individuals with whom she could collaborate for research purposes:

> *You find (the session) interesting, or you find the questions from the floor (interesting), you clue in and you think, sort of this little light goes on, "Ah! That person is on a similar wavelength to me, I want to talk to them more," you go over, you say, "Hi! I was really interested by your question. I think we're struggling with similar issues," or "I liked your paper. I would really like to talk with you further because the work I'm doing on 'blah' overlaps." (Interview #16)*

A student who has tackled the same topic as the professional, if confident enough, may dispense with the pretenses, and bordering on what might be considered rudeness, take a very direct approach, as this Veteran describes in his meeting of perhaps his biggest star:

> *I just walked up there, he's talking to someone: "Pardon me, I just wanted to meet you." And I introduced myself and he said, "What are you doing?" and I told him my dissertation, and he said, "Hey, that's really interesting stuff!" (Interview #13)*

Similarly, other confident graduate students reported

presenting themselves as individuals that have something to offer to the professional, as this New Pro recommends:

> *You have to tell them: "I'm doing something that is similar to you, and I would like to talk to you, I think you might find my ideas interesting." So you sell, you essentially present something that's valuable to them. And it usually works (Interview #10).*

Marketing Oneself: "Politicking"

Although all graduate students seem to perceive conferencing as important in the process of getting ahead in the academic world, it is the Veterans who talk more specifically about exactly where it is that these getting ahead strategies are to take them. Through watching and listening, and performing and initiating interaction, graduate students have laid the groundwork for focused strategies that are aimed at gaining acceptance to Ph.D. programs, securing scholarships, establishing publication records, and ultimately, getting jobs. Their graduate schooling and conference experiences, have contributed to an awareness of how the academic community operates politically in terms of granting such opportunities. This expertise is put into action at the conference when graduate students engage in what is here referred to as "politicking". The following comments made by a Veteran describe the nature of politicking at conferences:

> *It's a great opportunity to be political, it's a great opportunity to notice people that you cite a lot in the stuff that you do, and then you meet up*

with them, and just start a personal kind of network going between you and the individual, or to reinforce, because there's been a lot of corresponding, and perhaps this person's been sending you a lot of papers so basically it's been one-sided, so you go and try then to make a social contact to encourage that situation to keep going...Because you're in, you know, you're in an ask situation for the most part. So if the person gets tired of giving, where are you? You're sitting on dry land aren't you? (Interview #24)

For the purposes of this study, "politicking" is defined as the sum total of impression management strategies that a graduate student uses to market her/himself for academic gains in such areas as Ph.D. advancements, publication records, employment opportunities. In conversations with graduate students, they inevitably spoke of the importance of politicking in the conference situation, and described their perceptions as to what makes for successful politicking. They are aware of how reputations that have been developed through previous conference exposures influence subsequent politicking efforts. A Veteran makes this point when he tells of securing an important reference from a professional for a scholarship through the conferencing process:

I got to know him through other people at the Learneds...and I renewed my contact with him again at the Learneds like ten years later sort of thing...and he'd heard me give a paper and thought it was good...so these things cumulate to some extent...so contacts you make in one context can get renewed in another (Interview #5).

Some conference-going graduate students engage in politicking as a marketing strategy to gain notice for Ph.D.

programs. A New Pro reflects on her advisor's advice during her Masters Degree:

> *He made the point to me that if you intend to stay, to become an academic, it is absolutely vital to network, that if nobody ever heard your name before, nobody knows of you...your chances of being accepted at different universities is always limited because of your visibility (Interview #12).*

Another Veteran, in stressing the importance of conferencing as a marketing strategy for Ph.D. scholarships, notes that it is one of many variables that in combination better one's opportunities for scholastic recognition:

> *They have to make a decision of, you know, two hundred people in the Ph.D. program. They've got to decide how to rank the top twenty or whatever, and so (conferencing) would definitely enter into that...So you get the sense that in order to succeed, you've got to present papers and prepare to publish (Interview #8).*

Most frequently graduate students spoke of the importance of politicking as a means of furthering chances for employment. Creating a more impressive curriculum vitae through paper presentation at a conference is a politicking tactic for the employment-conscious graduate students. In this regard, one New Pro saw a record of conference paper presentations as being second-best to a publishing record on a curriculum vitae, still he acknowledges the importance of the former:

> *Senior faculty make it clear that if you haven't reached a point in your scholarship yet where you can publish then you better get to conferences, so that when you hit the job market that your vitae looks strong...Then there are grad students who conference and publish. I think they're likely the strongest employable, right? (Interview #10)*

Usually it is the Veterans who voice a more pressing concern about career opportunities than the more novice graduate students because getting a job is an immediate priority for Veterans. They tend to be more preoccupied with the fact that they will soon leave the "unreal" world of the graduate student for the career or "real world" of the professional academic. Therefore, conferences represent very important situations for graduate students in this stage of transition for it is there that they can market themselves for the professionals who are likely to be influential in deciding who gets hired. A Veteran (R) reveals how her focus during conferencing has changed over the years in the following excerpt from a conversation with the interviewer (I):

> *R: Increasingly now, as I'm approaching the end of my Ph.D., (I'm finding out) what kind of job openings and opportunities there are, and letting people know that: "Yes, I am willing and interested in moving this time next year." In fact, I say to people: "This time next year I hope to be at the conference and say, 'And in the fall I will be teaching at...', you know, so that, in that sense there's a certain amount of advertising oneself.*
>
> *I: And you say that you notice that you're doing that toward the end of your Ph.D?*
>
> *R: Yea. I figure I have one year left. At this time next year we'll be celebrating the completion.*
>
> *I: So your reasons for attending, or what you do at conferences has changed over the years?*
>
> *R: Only this year in terms of advertising my availability, that's the only change (Interview #16).*

One Veteran supports this notion of more seriously politicking for jobs toward the latter stages of graduate school in his account of having been encouraged by a star to apply for a job when he was a Neophyte:

> *I wouldn't have wanted the job anyway, it was much too early in my career. I think I was just glad I'd met somebody who'd said, "Ready to apply for a job." (Interview #5)*

Many of the graduate students who spoke of the necessity of conference involvement for career advancement purposes were noticeably displeased. This Veteran complained about feeling compelled to do conferencing activities in order to get a better job than "doing sessionals all the time" (Interview 15):

> *I usually hate these events...I know that this is the stuff that you've got to do at conferences, but it's taken me a long time to realize that if you're interested in a career, or if you're going to make money, or if you're going to survive, you got to do it. You got to meet people, and you've got to drink with them, and you've got to listen to the horror stories about how they're divorced (Interview #15).*

The following comments were made by a Veteran who seemingly missed the "good old days" when graduate students weren't fixated on climbing the career ladder:

> *I find that with, even with grad students right now everyone's so damn serious. And I don't think it's intellectual seriousness. I think it's career seriousness. And it's not too encouraging either (Interview #8).*

Graduate students perceived politicking as a strategy shared by all conference participants, including the majority of faculty. One Veteran shared a conversation that

had taken place between she and a tenured faculty member about the necessity of playing, as she called it, "the political game" (Interview #24):

> *You're always victimized, it's a political arena out there, and anyone who refuses to admit it is going to get stepped on, walked over...As (a tenured professor) said at the pizza thing the other night, "After you're tenured, then you can be who you are. Before that, you play the game or you are out of it...That's the reality. You'd like to think we academics were above that. Bottom line, we're not. It's the institution that calls the shots." (Interview #24)*

Politicking tactics evolve from and embrace the myriad of tactics that have been used during earlier years of conference attendance. They represent, perhaps, the more sophisticated impression management schemes that graduate students formulate as they become more conference "street-wise". Through these tactics, graduate students engage in more directed, or fine-tuned approaches to impression management. This Veteran points to the importance of combining interpersonal impression management techniques with high quality written work that has been marketed, as a tactic for successful marketing of oneself:

> *I mean all the usual stuff that in any area helps you to get a job, knowing people, them knowing you, having some sense that you're a known quantity, that you're predictable, reliable, all that kind of stuff, is generally speaking in any hiring situation important. So you're not going to get it just because you're the nice gal or guy who they knew at the conference, or even impressed with their presentation of a paper, unless you've got this written work that stands up...the politics of it is very real. As you know, when it comes down to making decisions within a department, there's always factions, and the fact*

that you don't have too many enemies, and that you can be seen as making a basically unbalanced, positive contribution to their faction and all this kind of stuff...will all count for you. So like in your area, people might have read your stuff, but outside your area, they probably won't have read your stuff. And so there you have to rely even more on your general reputation, so it is important (Interview #8).

Conforming to the personal practices of the professionals in the conference setting is a tactic that politicking graduate students often use in order to look like, the professionals. Presenting as part of the professional crowd in this way furthers the student's attempts to gain acceptance to that group. This excerpt from the researcher's field notes describes a situation in which the researcher assumed that an individual (MM) with whom she was speaking was a professor, when in fact the woman was a graduate student:

I met MM today in the woman's washroom. We were washing our hands at neighbouring sinks, and "out-of-the-blue" MM tells me that she really likes my earrings. I said something like, "I can get away with wild earrings because I'm still a graduate student," thinking all the time that this tastefully-dressed woman in conservative clothing was a professor. I was shocked when MM advised that she too was a graduate student, but that she dressed as she did for the purpose of trying to, pass as a professional! (field note 1988)

This field note tells of a graduate student's decision to conform to the drinking practices of a publisher in order to increase his chances of getting his recently-completed thesis published:

He told humourous tales about how his publisher was quite the boozer, and proceeded to order drink

upon drink, pouring them back faster than he had ever seen. Wanting to be of good company, he felt that it was only appropriate to keep up the (drinking) pace so as not to embarrass the publisher, so as not to make the publisher look as if he was the deviant drinker. So he proceeded to match the publisher drink for drink, and not being a "drinker" got drunk very quickly (field note 1988).

An often-mentioned tactic that is used as an advertising technique is that of "networking". For the graduate student intent on politicking, this term describes the act of developing a system of relationships through the expansion of already established social contacts. In this way, as a person's social circle expands, the potential for more extensive networking also increases. One Veteran described the concept of the "strength of weak ties", aspect of networking and how it could help in the search for employment (Interview #13). He used his newly formed relationship with the researcher as an example:

We would now be described as a weak tie. If I saw you somewhere else, I mean I know you, you're part of my network now, but it's a weak tie, I really don't know you, but I'm more apt, for example, to get a good job through you, than I am from (my girlfriend). Because really, what you do is, you act as a gatekeeper to another solid social network, or maybe not solid, but another social network, so you can now make me aware of opportunities that I would otherwise not have been made aware of (Interview #13).

Widening one's circle of contacts through extended networking is a tactic that also reduces the risk of remaining an "unknown" who, by virtue of being a "nobody",

would be less attractive to a professional. One Veteran elaborated on this point:

> *It's a matter of getting rid of all the things that could deny you a fair evaluation; all the negatives that could be put up; all the people that could decide that they don't like you because they don't know you, you know, you want to remove all of those possible bases for objecting to you when it comes to being hired...(so) you get to know as many people as you can, not only in your own area, especially not in your own area... because people in your own areas should know your own work to some degree, and you'll get to know them by presenting papers and by writing stuff...So that's not too hard that part of it to do, because you have a natural affinity, you're working on the same stuff (Interview #18).*

Intentionally getting to know professionals outside of one's specialty area is a tactic also utilized by Veterans in order to present themselves as not radically allied with any one political faction within a department. This Veteran advises guarding against creating a reputation of strong allegiance with one group.

> *I'm quite persuaded that when it comes to a hiring position that it's at least of equal importance to the people outside your specialty to.....have some sense of you, and for you to be able to talk their concerns, 'cause you know when...they want to know whether you are going to be with them or against them in all these internal battles in the department (Interview #5).*

Trying to establish a reputation of versatility in terms of interests and knowledge is also an important tactic because it suggests that a person has the ability not only to appreciate a variety of perspectives, but also to teach a wide selection of courses, hence increasing marketing potential. Attending sessions outside of one's specialty

area is a tactic used to establish this impression, as is choosing a variety of classes to teach as a Teaching Assistant, and broadcasting this fact at the conference. As this Veteran points out:

> *If you show that you have a general competence and interest...in each of those areas...(it) doesn't make you that easy to pigeon-hole...I think that's reassuring to people (Interview #8).*

This chapter has explored impression management strategies used by conferencing graduate students. With the goal of "getting ahead", students progress from trying to "learn the ropes", to attempting to become recognized, to marketing themselves for employment. The means to these ends involve watching and listening, doing performances and initiating interaction, and politicking. The next chapter focuses more on the internal processes at play as graduate students grapple with identity issues.

CHAPTER 8

FROM ISOLATION TO THE REAL WORLD - IDENTITY VALIDATION STRATEGIES

Broadening Horizons

Based on conversations with both graduate student conference attenders and non-attenders, graduate students indicate differing world views with regard to what makes for a good graduate student experience in general. At the most fundamental level, some students feel it necessary to do more than the basic academic requirements (as outlined in the school calendar) in order to adequately prepare themselves for professional life after, or for that matter, during, graduate school. For those graduate students who perceive a need to go beyond the basic requirements, attendance at a professional scholarly conference is one of the involvements that can provide extracurricular academic and social exposure. Here students are given the opportunity to interact with a wide range of other graduate students and academics from schools other than those they attend. Such an opportunity is not common outside of the conference experience, and graduate students tend to become narrowly focused in that their academic life is restricted to the school at which they are registered. Although they are exposed to academics from all over the world through a vast supply of written information, they are socially isolated from interacting with graduate students and

academics from other universities. One graduate student, geographically isolated from other universities, commented on his situation, and that of graduate students in general:

> *Doing research and stuff like that, I found isolation was a major problem. I mean, I think it's the same problem for people who are going to school here...You know, I mean (mine is) just a slightly more exaggerated case of the same problem which is, graduate student isolation. So the nice thing about being here is being with other people who are going through some of the same things (Interview #14).*

A Veteran makes the same observation:

> *It's lonely enough being a graduate student anywhere in the sense that you do very specialized work that nobody else is doing, and you're usually of an age where you may have kids, or a personal life, or may have been out working or whatever, and so you're not like what you were as an undergraduate when you had lots of time to hang or all this kind of stuff (Interview #8).*

Given these feelings of isolation, it is understandable why graduate students who aspire to professional academic careers feel the need for exposure to graduate students and professionals from other schools. The conference setting provides an extensive variety of new reference groups through which graduate students can expand their perspectives. The importance of this exposure process, referred to here as "broadening horizons", is illustrated in this conversation between the researcher (I) and a second-time conference attender (R):

> *R: It's important because you get into a particular kind of area or ideas, get associated with other people.*
>
> *I: And why is that important?*

R: Um, for two things, actually. One is in order to make broader your point of view, because...you kind of start with one or two advisors, you know, a committee or something like this, one two or three and that's it...When you come to something like this and you're exposed...to more ideas, new names...you're broader, so I think that's important (Interview #11).

Another second-time attender made a similar statement:

That's the point of this, is to get to know people around the country and elsewhere that are involved in your interests (Interview #1).

Through the process of "broadening horizons", graduate students see themselves as gaining exposure to the "real world", a world which is much different from the more protected day-to-day world of the graduate student. An experienced conference attender described this distinction:

(Graduate students) need exposure, you have to get exposure, and there's an interest, you know, you've never been to a conference, it's a jury by your peers so to speak; you present your ideas and you have to graduate from getting A's and B's and C's and out into the real world. Exposure. And you may stumble, but you've got to think that way (Interview #5).

A New Pro spoke of her first conference which was a graduate student conference. The majority of students in attendance were first or second year Ph.D. students. In reference to the more advanced students' involvement at a different, higher status, professional conference, this graduate student said:

They went to the real world...the real world being where the jobs are (Interview #12).

Aspiring to the professional world of academia, graduate students, through role taking and role making, actively construct their own meaning of the academic world around them, and their place in it. Central to this process are the ever-changing identities of these students. Using a situated approach, this chapter explores some of the generic tactics involved in the identity validation strategies: 1) assessing academic identity through social comparison processes; 2) validating a scholarly identity through "tuning in" and "tuning out"; 3) maintaining a human identity through seeing profs as "people" and holding on to the "fun" self. It is recognized that the types of identities sought-after by students are varied, complex, and intertwined. These three categories, while useful for the purposes of discussion, are not meant to imply that the processes involved are mutually exclusive.

Assessing Academic Identity: Social Comparison Processes

Because of their usual situations of isolation, and their exposure to "broader horizons" at conferences, graduate students may struggle with feelings of uncertainty with regard to their readiness for, or their desire to be a part of the "real world" of the sociologist. They undergo a process of evaluating whether or not they are worthy of, or suited for this role. One Veteran about to finish his dissertation, describes the conferencing process as being a

time of contemplating one's identification with the role of "academic":

> *So it brings out a different aspect of your personality. And it is linked up to where you are, and what stage you are in the self-definition: Are you an academic? Are you going to be an academic? Is this what you want to do with the rest of your life? Yea, and at a certain point you're going to have to admit, "Okay, I don't like the outside world." (Interview #15)*

A less-experienced New Pro makes the same point:

> *(Graduate students are) going there to really make their first contact with this body of academics which they're joining for at least a couple of years, and maybe pondering whether they're going to join them for life, if you join anything for life anymore (Interview #6).*

This comment illustrates how uncertainty about pursuing an identity as a professional sociologist may be salient for graduate students at a conference:

> *All I can think about today, and yesterday, is, "Do I really want to become a sociologist? Will I ever be able to think like these people? Do I want to think like them and be like them? Will I be able to fit in outside of this circle if I do become like them?" (field note 1988)*

The way in which a graduate student made reference to her/himself relative to the professionals shed light on her/his identification with an academic role. Many graduate students made statements which indicated their feelings of role distance from the professionals. In reference to their identities, these graduate students articulated a separation between themselves and those who they saw as sociologists. Often it is the Neophytes who make a clear distinction between themselves and "the sociologists". This Neophyte,

in discussing her observation that the style of dress at a conference differs from the styles within the university setting, refers to sociologists as a group separate from herself:

> *I'd say that people are dressing up more formally than they normally do...I'd assume knowing sociologists, that they're not always like this (Interview #7).*

Some graduate students expressed neither feelings of uncertainty nor of role distance with regard to the academic identity, but instead made statements which suggested that they viewed themselves as belonging to the "professional" academic group. This Neophyte suggests that it was during the conferencing process that she and some other students underwent a transition and developed identities as professional academics:

> *I just had lunch with two other Masters students, and...we all three said the same thing. This is the first time that we all felt like a sociologist...Now I really feel like saying, "Yea, I'm a sociologist," but I can't say that those words ever came out of my mouth before (Interview #22).*

This confident New Pro revealed that she strongly identified as a "sociologist" by stressing her ability to maintain an objective view of the conferencing process:

> *I'm a sociologist...I watch people network like mad...I'm being an observer...I'm very detached from this whole process...it's like anything a sociologist does...you watch! (Interview #12)*

A process of social comparison is continually used by graduate students in assessing their identities as

academics. By comparing oneself with other people, one can gauge how one is doing relative to other people (Festinger 1954). In some instances, graduate students assess their identification as an academic by looking to the professionals for social comparison purposes. A New Pro, for example, spoke of wanting to get some general feedback from those he considered to be academics in order to make a social comparison:

> *I just want to share what I've been doing in my thesis work...I want to share some of these experiences with a small group of academics, and sort of get some reaction to it, whether it be academic, or just sort of a personal, "How do you lead your life as a researcher?" sort of comments (Interview #19).*

This Veteran, as a result of social comparison, expresses feelings of being set apart from an academic identity, for the following reason:

> *I mean, you look around and most of the people who have secure jobs and everything else, and they're academics, they're essentially middle class people...My background is essentially working class and I've had difficulty in dealing with academics and how I fit into this (the academic) world (Interview #15).*

In the social comparison process, a graduate student may look not only to the professionals, but also to other graduate students in an attempt to measure her/his competence as one aspiring academic among many. As a means of introduction to her discussion in the interview with the researcher, this Veteran, who was older than the majority of graduate students, made the following comment, illustrating

her practice of comparing herself with other graduate students:

> *I'm inclined to say that I'm a bit atypical, but the more I talk to other graduate students, I'm not that atypical (Interview #16).*

Another Veteran spoke of how conference participants actively engage in a process of evaluating one another's academic identities:

> *In the sessions when we're answering questions, asking them and then answering them, we're listening to each other and we're regrouping, and I think that's what's happening here (Interview #9).*

One doctoral student who had been a discussant in a session explained that she had sought out validation for her academic assessment of a paper by consulting with professionals who specialized in that area:

> *I had a couple of other people read the paper just to make sure I wasn't missing the point (Interview #12).*

The same New Pro made further reference to her use of social comparison when she commented on a conversation that she had had with a paper-presenting doctoral student (WD) in her session. WD had just finished her dissertation, and was expressing to the New Pro feelings of dejection with regard to the academic worthiness of her work. The New Pro, also a finishing doctoral student, was experiencing similar feelings, however she perceived WD's work as being admirable. Through the process of social comparison with

WD, the New Pro felt a sense of renewed faith in her own work, as her following comment exemplifies:

> *What was really nice is that when I talked to WD...she told me her paper came out of her dissertation which...just like me she had sent it off, and she was feeling very down about it, and it was so nice to hear someone else say (that they were feeling down about their work because) here was a piece of work that had real value (Interview #12).*

An Veteran told of attending another woman's paper which was on the same topic as she was presenting on later that day, perhaps the "ideal type" social comparison situation:

> *(I went) so I could listen to the other person who is presenting on basically the same thing I was...it would have been too bad to miss that... (She) said something in her presentation that was almost like the same wording as something that I had written in my thesis, (and I thought), "Maybe I didn't do anything original here." But by the end of the presentation, I really...felt fine... but I took it a couple of steps further...and with talking to (other people) I felt that I had gone beyond a descriptive study, and combined it to make it a theoretical one as well (Interview #17).*

A New Pro, prior to her paper-presentation, talked of reading the paper of another student who was presenting in her session, seemingly as a social comparison tactic:

> *In my session, for example, the other one who is going to give a paper is a student as well, and I've read his paper and it's okay, it's fine. Mine is okay as well (Interview #11).*

This New Pro was anxious for an opportunity to engage in social comparison with a paper-presenter whose abstract indicated research findings that ran contrary to his work in the same area. The fact that there was someone else working

on the same topic seemed, for the New Pro, to lend academic importance to his research topic. He said:

> *I have to contact this guy, just to see what's the difference...but the conference was worthwhile just for that...knowing that there's someone doing (the same research) (Interview #19).*

One Veteran paper presenter received negative feedback from his discussant. Following the presentation of his paper, he utilized social comparison to reinforce his credibility as an academic. He revealed that he had attended to the more positive opinions of some of the audience members in the session, yet he would have liked to have expanded his opinion poll:

> *The other people there, who may just have been being nice to me, said that they felt that it was clearer from what I was saying what I had been trying to do than she had given me credit for. You know, it's obviously hard to say because I'm on one extreme side of the situation. It would be interesting if I'd also talked to the discussant and some of the other people there (Interview #14).*

Validating a Scholarly Identity: "Tuning In" and "Tuning Out"

A common theme among graduate students was their expressed desire for a scholarly identity. The dictionary defines "scholarly" as follows:

> One who is quick...at learning...a learned or erudite person (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1933).

To have a scholarly identity then, points to a perception of self as intelligent, wise, seriously studious. An academic identity, for the purposes of this discussion, suggests one's

affiliation with, or aspiration to the role of those in the "business" of academe. A dictionary definition of the term "academic" is:

> Of or belonging to an academy or institution for higher learning...Of, or belonging to a learned society, or association for the promotion of art or science (The Oxford English Dictionary, 1933).

The term "academic" can also have a pejorative connotation:

> Not leading to a decision; unpractical, theoretical, formal or conventional...Conforming too rigidly to the principles (in painting, etc.) of an academy; excessively formal (A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary, 1972).

Given these definitions, a scholarly identity can be differentiated from an academic identity in that an individual may possess the qualities of a scholar without identifying with, or aspiring to an academic role. Conversely, although identified as an academic, an individual may seemingly be "out-of-touch" with the qualities associated with being scholarly.

For the majority of graduate students, the conference symbolizes an event through which their scholarly abilities will be evaluated. The following quote taken from an interview with a New Pro illustrates the way in which graduate student conference attenders generally view the conference:

> *I've presented papers at two other conferences which were largely run and organized by graduate students for graduate students, and I was a little worried about coming out of that which was a very sympathetic and supportive environment for presenting work to a rather more academic and important kind of conference that would have a lot more tenured faculty and that sort of thing (Interview #2).*

Various conference experiences can lead to the validation of a scholarly identity for graduate students, depending on the meanings they attribute to the situations, and on the outcome of their performances in those situations. One New Pro captured this notion of the pursuit of a scholarly identity through her description of what was, for her, the positive experience of presenting a paper:

> *I found it's very helpful to have given a paper myself because of the response that I get from people who come to speak to me about my work, and it gives us a feeling of legitimacy that you have a right to be a scholar among scholars, and not just a graduate student sneaking in by the back door. And I think it does sort of place you in the community in a particular way which is very useful (Interview #2).*

A Veteran noted that the validation of a scholarly identity was, for him, one of the rewards of conference attendance. His identity validation came through his interaction with one of his former professors:

> *One (of the)...payoffs...on the interpersonal level would be that, he was my professor. Now he's asking my opinion, and he really wants to know it, and...it's a respect now that I've gained. Because if I was just your standard, normal everyday student, it would be just, "How you doing?" He actually wants to meet with me for some academic intellectual purposes (Interview #13).*

Even though this New Pro attended the conference only to offer support to a paper presenter, he acknowledged that somewhat accidentally his scholarly identity was reinforced through his attendance at the sessions:

> *There were some sort of serendipitous results. I really enjoyed the papers that were presented and it*

gave me a chance to use my sociology and sort of test my knowledge of sociology...I felt good about myself...I felt that maybe I was losing some of my edge in sociology...so by attending that part of the conference it helps me feel a little bit better about myself, that I'm not losing my edge in sociology (Interview #18).

The importance of receiving validation for a scholarly identity was, perhaps, most evident when a graduate student felt that she/he had been denied this type of validation when her/his conference participation had warranted it. Many students reported a range of feelings of dissatisfaction with this image of the conference for similar reasons. For example, this Neophyte expressed her anger and disappointment with some of the professionals' attitudes toward the conference when she perceived it to be an important scholarly event:

It's nice, it's nice to get that reaffirmation for work...I wish my seminar was more well-organized, I wish our work was taken more seriously in that sense. I mean, you know, one prof told me that people refer to this as the "stupids." It really bothered me, you know, like this is a big deal to me (Interview #21).

Instead of feeling angry, some students suggested that they were surprised when the conference was presented by faculty as unimportant, for they had anticipated that the event was respected as a forum in which scholarly endeavours would be scrutinized. A Neophyte, who described herself as "just an observer" at the conference, expressed surprise at what was a faculty member's negative attitude toward the CSAA meetings. Unlike the last example, this graduate student

seemed to just "shrug off" the member's attempts to portray the conference as unimportant, her scholarly identity remaining unaffected:

> *A number of the same faculty who had previously in a general way encouraged me to come said, "Well why do you want to go there? It's just a number of graduate students reading papers."...But that's fine with me, you know...because I'd really like to meet some other grad students (Interview #22).*

Similarly, this New Pro expressed shock with regard to her thesis supervisor's blatant dismissal of the conference as an event of scholarly importance:

> *One of the things that really surprised me was that ...my supervisor...said to me, "I think it's a waste of time for you to go...I promise you that no one, no more than three people will come to your session, because most of the meetings are being held in the bar anyway, and people aren't coming, the papers are really low-level, and most people are really not prepared for the paper they are giving. Most of the people are graduate students, or at the beginning of their graduate (studies), so you're not going to enjoy it." (Interview #11)*

Graduate students, in their quest for a scholarly identity, utilize what are referred to here as "tuning in" and "tuning out" tactics for the purpose of at best, validating, or at worst, rescuing their scholarly identities. Not surprisingly, graduate students tend to focus on, or "tune in" to positive feedback and neutralize, ignore, or "tune out" negative feedback. Collectively speaking, the "tuning" tactics ensure the preservation, and sometimes the enhancement, of the scholarly identity.

With regard to tuning in, positive verbal recognition, although most always appreciated, is in some cases viewed by

graduate students as "carrying more weight". Generally speaking, a compliment coming from a person of higher status who is "looked up to" by the graduate student will be more highly valued than one coming from a person of equal or lower status (Nisbett and Wilson 1978). The content of the compliment also influences it's importance, as this New Pro notes:

> *People often don't have a chance to read the paper beforehand...sometimes it's just the very sort of impersonal, sort of superficial feedback to say, you know, 'I really enjoyed your paper, could you send me a copy 'cause I'm interested in the subject (Interview #19).*

Some professionals are viewed as being insincere, hence their words, although positive, lack credibility for the graduate student. One New Pro, (CM) who impressed the researcher as being pessimistic about his scholarly identity, often questioned the praise handed to him by a professional. In this example, the professional's (PB) compliments are based on the New Pro's paper which he had presented the day previous. Although CM admired PB's academic expertise, he did not trust the man's interpersonal sincerity, as was recorded in the researcher's field notes:

> *I see PB as having given CM "pats on the head." PB called CM a "hero" at lunch the last day, saying "I'm going to have a basket of chicken fingers like my hero, CM." CM isn't sure about PB's comments toward him, (i.e. Are they sincerely congratulatory? What's the motive?) CM is unsure if he "really measures up in this type of thing." When someone at the conference says a congratulatory thing, he takes it in stride, is glad they said it, but wonders whether there is truth in what they're saying (field note 1987).*

As it is with positive feedback, negative criticism is also a means of scholarly validation, if delivered by a higher status, respected person whose comments are thorough and substantive. In such situations, the student feels that her/his work is worthy of being taken seriously. Furthermore, such constructive criticism is seen as helpful in that it assists the student in the pursuit of the scholarly identity. The following anecdote, relayed by a New Pro illustrates this point:

> *Last year my respondent was just super...I'd done this paper for a course, and I'd gotten an A and I'd gotten a lot of feedback, and then this respondent zeroed in, and picked the paper apart, and really showed me um, the crucial areas I'd missed, and the way I'd been misusing the theory...Very succinctly, in five minutes, wonderfully...That was wonderful... because he was right...I, as much as anyone else, like a pat on the back, and I think just in terms of the way people deliver their critique it's always nice to be hit with a nice compliment before the constructive critique, and he did that. He seemed to welcome the approach with enthusiasm. And, even you know, his critique showed a concern with the paper that this previous prof who marked it hadn't really shown (Interview #19).*

Sometimes graduate students will receive what would in most cases be perceived as a less-than-favourable response from a professional, by being ignored, or snubbed in response to their attempts at interaction. Interestingly, although encounters of this type could potentially be perceived as negative experiences, such rebuffs are usually treated as superficial situations, and their importance as identity-threatening encounters is minimized. Because they are

perceived in this way, "cold shoulder" incidents do not negate the scholarly identity validation process. The following excerpt from an interview with a Veteran demonstrates this perception:

> *What you'll get is sometimes sort of a cold shoulder, or it's clear they're polite to you but they're too busy elsewhere. So you just take that with a grain of salt and you go on, because they won't even remember the contact, I think we tend to think, "Oh my God, they're going to remember that horrible thing I said, or that I went up to them and spoke to them." They don't (Interview #16).*

Sometimes negative feedback from professionals is directly relayed verbally to the graduate student, and is clearly, in such cases, perceived by the graduate student as an attack on her/his scholarly identity. In these situations, a prominent tactic used by graduate students to rescue a scholarly identity was to "dish out" negative criticisms in return. They, in a sense, "attacked the attacker" by attempting to invalidate the critic's negative feedback. These rebuttals were not always delivered directly, because graduate students perceive that such openness would most likely be viewed as a sign of disrespect and consequently might result in the negation of a positive impression that they had been attempting to convey. An experienced conference attender, in the process of completing his dissertation, shared a painful experience in which his scholarly identity was not validated, but attacked. Following his paper presentation, the discussant's criticisms suggested that he had failed in what he had set out to do in his research

project. The graduate student felt that the discussant should have indicated her disagreement with the whole nature of the project, as he felt the project itself had been successfully carried out. In order to protect his scholarly identity, he in turn criticized the discussant's critique, thereby justifying the proof of his scholarly abilities (i.e. his written work). His account of the situation revealed that his criticisms were not delivered in the session itself however. He described how he felt about the discussant's criticisms, and how he intended to "arm" himself for potential instances like this one. Therefore, future planning about how to handle oneself in repeat scenarios is a tactic that graduate students employ in dealing with negative critiques.

> *And I hope for next year that I will actually prepare myself so that if something like that arises I will actually say, "You know, I'm willing to accept criticism, this is what I felt was invalid in what you were saying, but please appreciate what the nature of the project is, you know, this is what I'm trying to do. If you disagree with that, let's talk about that disagreement. Let's not pretend that it's an invalid project. Let's talk about our disagreements about the nature of this kind of sociological research or whatever." Um, but I didn't feel confident enough to do that this year. So afterwards I was depressed, and then I was angry and then, and now I feel fine again (Interview #14).*

Maintaining a Human Identity: Seeing Profs as People and Holding On To the "Fun" Self

In addition to 1) assessing one's identity relative to an academic identity, and 2) seeking validation for a scholarly identity, many graduate students referred to a desire to

reserve what might be called a "human identity". Those involved in the academic role are frequently stereotyped as being serious individuals who focus their efforts solely on studious pursuits. Often graduate students have not been exposed to academic professionals in social situations, and are therefore unaware of the fact that professionals can also manifest identities other than those of "academic" and "scholar". Conceptualizing academics according to stereotypic images, they fear becoming a professional whose role would be exclusively "academic". This New Pro's comments reflect what is generally graduate student appreciation of observable "human" identities among the professionals who are known for their academic identities:

> *It's nice to actually see the people, and see that there are actually people there who can tell a joke, and have a drink at a party, as well as talk about the decline of the American Empire, so that's important (Interview #19).*

This field note, based on a Neophyte experience, shows how conferences may, in some cases, represent the first time that a graduate student fully appreciates the fact that profs are "human" as well as "academic". In this instance, the researcher recalls a tenured professor (TG) who related to her a story about his attempt to pick up a woman at another conference:

> *TG had gone to a bar and struck up a conversation with a woman who he found to be attractive. He really enjoyed talking to her and after about an hour and a half he could see that things were "moving right along", and he could envisage a bedroom scene coming his way that evening. Just*

when he was about to make his move, (another female friend of his, [AF]) came over to where he and this woman were sitting at the bar...and the real punch line to this story is that as TG talked to AF, he realized that the other woman's voice had a totally different quality about it when compared to AF's. In fact this quality was so distinctively different that it caused TG to think that the "woman" he had been hustling was in fact a man in drag...and we chuckled over that one....I had expected sociology professors to be different...and TG's focus on sex did not fit my stereotype of the academic, and I thought at the time that these people might just be like "regular" people, and not on the pedestals that I have always tended to place university professors (field note 1987).

Therefore, although aspiring to a professional role, graduate students want to, and realize that they can retain aspects of their current identities, aspects that are more casual, light-hearted, and people-oriented than the characteristics often associated with an academic role. In addition to seeking the more serious identities, they wish to identify as "fun" individuals. The following quote from a Veteran illustrates his view of himself as someone who, because of his prior work experience in sales, has retained a non-academic appearance, and consequently is able to integrate more easily with the general population. He reinforced this casual, non-academic identity repeatedly during the interview:

I think sales allowed me to...put back on my jeans and T-shirt, you know, you don't look like an academic...I keep myself trim...and I like to dress reasonably well...I don't look like an academic and so...you don't get the image...then it's much easier to blend into (a general population) (Interview #5).

In reference to his previous attendance at a different conference, a New Pro proudly related a story about his

affiliation with a group of sociologists who he saw as being more lively and hence more his type than some of the other sociologists. He distinguished between this group and another group of academics, suggesting his preference for an identity as a "partier":

> *There are the beer-drinking interactionists, and the suit-and-tie interactionists...I fell in with the beer-drinking bunch...I find (these descriptions) to be much more informative than the Chicago-Iowa School (Interview #10).*

This Veteran also identified himself as a partying individual who valued conference attendance as a means for reuniting and socializing with old friends:

> *So I started writing letters, "You going to the conference?" So now we're all going to meet here. And Social Work organized a dinner party on the boat down at the river, so we all made sure we bought tickets, that's going to be the central thing (Interview #13).*

In a similar vein, this New Pro talked at length with the researcher about the importance of getting to know people and establishing social relationships at conferences, suggesting his desire for an identity as a people-oriented person:

> *But if you go to a conference, and you just pop in and out, and you don't make any effort to spend any time with people and get to know them as people...you (won't) get a sense that they are somebody for you. And like when I go away from this, you're going to be somebody, not just a blank file...and I know certain things about you, we've spent some time together, and you know certain things about me. And we've had these interactions, and we're in the formative stages of a relationship ...But...if you go to a conference, and you don't have these things happen, I think you might as well stay home, because you're not going to get that much out of the sessions....A conference is an opportunity to meet people (Interview #6).*

To summarize, this chapter has focused on the ways in which graduate students attempt to validate particular identites in the conference situation. Attendance at a conference is seen as a move from a relatively isolated social world to what graduate students see as being the more real world of academia. The expanded reference group in the real world allows for: the assessing of an academic identity; the validating of a scholarly identity; and the maintenance of a "human" identity. Graduate students use processes of social comparison, "tuning -in" and "tuning out", and seeing profs as people and holding onto the "fun" self, in their struggle with identity issues. The next chapter looks at graduate student strategies that emerge in problematic situations.

CHAPTER 9

HANDLING ANXIOUS SITUATIONS - COPING STRATEGIES

Conference attendance can present many anxiety-producing professional and social situations for a graduate student. A lot of this anxiety stems from the fact that students are in positions of lower status in comparison to the professionals. This Veteran, having just finished his dissertation made the following observation:

> *I think the anxiety level at conferences is really high, and there's a lot of defenses that go around with, I mean especially among graduate students, whether you're a first-time presenter or a veteran doing your stuff, or even if you're an onlooker (Interview #15).*

This chapter focuses on some of the role tactics used by graduate students when faced with anxious situations where coping strategies are used. The coping strategies, and their accompanying role tactics have been described as follows: 1) getting along through social support seeking; 2) getting high through "boozing it up"; 3) getting by through taking a "free ride"; 4) getting through by "making like a professional"; and 5) getting comic relief by seeing the humourous side.

Getting Along: Social Support Seeking

Social situations sometimes pose as anxiety-producing events because, in terms of interaction, they are less structured than are the organized sessions. Mingling and

engaging in conversation is the norm at social events, consequently graduate students often feel "out of place" given that they are of lower status and that they may not know many of the people in attendance. To shy away from meeting new people and interacting with them results in feelings of guilt or embarrassment given the expectation that one of the things a person should be doing at conferences is making contacts. These feelings of anxiety are accentuated when a graduate student goes alone to a conference and knows no one there. An experienced conference attender compares her feelings of intimidation at one conference where she was "alone" with her more enjoyable feelings at the smaller, Interactionist conference where she knew people:

> *Yep, yep...(it was) very intimidating...in a strange city, to me a strange city, with people I didn't know. So that was quite different than something like this here on Sunday which was, "Oh well, play this cool, and once I get there, there'll at least be that fun part of it, that isn't...", you know...the familiarity of it makes a big difference (Interview #17).*

Another graduate student, new to the city of Windsor, tells of arriving at the CSAA and feeling a sense of loneliness and isolation:

> *Number one, we were tired after the drive, but number two I was sort of at a loss as to what to do last night. Um, there didn't seem to be anything going on in the evening and I didn't sort of know where to go or whatever, and by seven o'clock things had sort of been deserted and you didn't quite know where and what and that kind of thing...there didn't seem to be any kind of a network in terms of meeting people that are sort*

of isolated that have come without other people and that kind of thing (Interview #1).

Seeking out people that you can "hang out with" is the common coping strategy for those who find themselves "alone" at conferences. This Veteran, a foreign student, used talking with the researcher in the interview situation as a tactic for overcoming her feelings of isolation. As the interview was winding-down, she apologized for taking so much of my time:

> *Sorry for taking (so much time). Only because I was lonely I thought, "I will talk everything to you." (Interview #4)*

Another Veteran in a similar situation of being alone socially, attended sessions as a tactic to meet people with whom he could hang out and drink beer. He expressed his happiness at having been invited by me the day previous to a beer and pizza party at the Grad House. I had met this Veteran at the registration desk when I was scheduling an interview time with him:

> *I've been going to...pretty much all the sessions, which is partly because...the people I am closest to academically aren't here right now, so I don't know that many people to hang out and drink beer with, and so I've been going to sessions instead. And that's what I've found so far...but, um, last night at the pub I met a couple of people...Yea, that was great!...You know, it was really fun...We went on talking there until after we got kicked out of the Grad House Pub, and then we went to the Faculty Club after that...It was just, you know, a nice chance to talk with people and in somewhat different situations and stuff like that, so that I think has been one of the strong points in the conference for me (Interview #14).*

For those graduate students who go to conferences with faculty members and/or friends, or who re-establish relationships at the conference, hanging out with these pre-existing connections is a tactic used to deal with unknown situations which, it is anticipated, will be uncomfortable. A Veteran recalls going to her first conference with other graduate students from her university:

> *So we went. And...we decided to protect each other, and we would go together kind of thing, so we sort of mentored each other, it was more a feminist model, you know...because it was...a group of women who all felt that this would be a good idea for them, for a myriad of reasons, um, and we went together, and we sort of took care of each other...And I think that's one thing that feminists have learned that you form a collective and that gives you strength, because it's hard to do it totally on your own, but when you have a group, and somebody's giving you the cold shoulder or something, or has his nose up in the air, or is too knowledgeable to speak to a grad student, if you go back to your group, and you said, "Well, what do you think of that guy?" you've got the support system, so you don't feel as if it's a constant barrage to your ego (Interview #16).*

The following field note excerpt illustrates how a graduate student can feel very reliant on those (L and C and B) with whom she/he has gone to the conference:

> *So we drove together to the conference, and spent the rest of the evening getting to know some of the other people who had arrived. I felt really uneasy when I was separated from...L and C and B...because I didn't know what to talk about, if I was being interesting or not, etc. The evening went pretty well, though, because usually when I was interacting with the new people, L and C and B were a part of the same group. C.....felt even more uncomfortable than I did based on what he said about the time he'd had all night (feels really uncomfortable) (field note, 1987).*

During a joint interview, two veteran conference attenders told of going together to the Presidents Reception. One woman (R) spoke of feeling very out of place as she always did in social situations where she felt obliged to mingle with strangers. She felt that she was "the only one" who shied away from meeting new people, and was surprised when her friend (J) pointed out that she had noticed people grouping together with those they already knew:

> *J: As we came in, we talked to people that we knew, and then as we walked around we talked to people that we had met beforehand. But one of the things that intrigued me was watching people that I knew. They were all talking to people that they worked with, or that you could say they had a linkage with.*
>
> *R: So it means that, it would be appropriate that you, that you and I should be together rather than with the other groups. I didn't notice that. That's interesting (Interview #9).*

If a graduate student is fortunate enough to have the emotional support and presence of a professional person, or mentor during the conferencing process, anxiety-producing situations can arise wherein the student finds it comforting to lean on the mentor for emotional support. Engaging in discussion with the mentor, and receiving a critique of how one is handling oneself in the conference situation helps the graduate student gain confidence. In this case, the field note describes a Neophyte experience:

> *She gave me feedback that let me know that I was handling myself okay, and she told me to "keep doing" what I had been doing, i.e. mingling, etc. Because on the same evening in the hospitality room, I had worried about what (some other*

graduate students) had been saying about my interacting with (some new people), and I was in need of some feedback...I explained my concern about what I perceived to be negative perceptions of my behaviour on the part of (these students)... (Her) words of encouragement were significant "pats on the head." (field note 1987)

Regardless of whether or not graduate students successfully seek-out new relationships, or group with pre-established ones as a tactic for coping with anxiety, social situations can still arise wherein the student "drifts around feeling vaguely disembodied" (Geertz 1973, 413). As the following field note illustrates, a graduate student feels invisible when with a group of people who interact as if she does not exist. In this case, the group was comprised of three professionals (The Pros) who, were revered as "stars" even though they were "strangers":

During breakfast I was a listener in a conversation that took place among...(The Pros)... They were each talking about their wives and the type of home life each had, i.e. with traditional roles, or with more modern arrangements. The nature of the conversation was, I felt, rather intimate considering that I was a stranger in their presence. I had the feeling that my non-contributing presence was accepted by these men, as they seemed to carry on as if I wasn't there. At the same time, I did feel somewhat uncomfortable because I wasn't contributing, and I wasn't sure if I should or if to do so would be acceptable. I tried to look as if I would answer any questions, or comment if they asked me to. I decided just to relax and drink the whole thing in." (field note 1987).

In this situation, the tactic was to remain silent while appearing willing to become involved in a conversation if someone in the group acknowledged her existence. A veteran

conference attender tells of using the same tactic in a large group at the Presidents Reception where she felt socially awkward and chose not to mingle:

> *I make sure as I said to you, I guess, that I look, as if I belong there. I look healthy, I look very nice. And ah, I um, smile, and I nod at people that I know, I don't impose myself on anybody, but I don't pretend that I wouldn't approach anybody. I look as if somebody could approach me, I think, but I'm glad they don't in a way, and you can get it over with and get on to something else (Interview #9).*

Getting High: "Boozing It Up"

Alcohol consumption is a common activity that accompanies most of the social situations at the conference. This New Pro, in discussing his socializing at the previous conference, remarked on the normative aspect of drinking at the conference:

> *Actually one of the things about that last conference is I drank a lot more beer than I used to drink. And I drank more beer than I think I intended going in, but it all seemed natural and inevitable and worthwhile as it happened (Interview #6).*

Because of alcohol's effect as an inhibition-reducing psychoactive drug, its use by graduate students serves as one tactic that can help to alleviate anxiety. This New Pro made this point in reminiscing about a graduate student party at one of the conferences:

> *It was a great party...the standard old beer, chips, it was just fun...Virtually everybody there had either presented a paper, or participated in a session. There was sort of that high that comes*

from the relief of having the tension...so everybody really let go (Interview #12).

Field notes compiled after a wine and cheese get-together point to the euphoric effects that alcohol can bring to an occasion that might otherwise remain anxious:

> *The party tonight turned out to be really lively. It was a "stuffy" cocktail party at first though, only a few people standing around, and a lot of people didn't know each other. The wine and the hors d'oeuvres were free, and before too long, a lot of people had arrived, and people started to loosen-up. By the end of the night many were becoming 'very friendly' to say the least (field note 1988).*

Over-indulging in alcohol consumption can have the reverse effect of relieving tension, however. One graduate student (SF) casually told the researcher about getting a bit "carried away" after she had been drinking at the Big Bash:

> *While conversing with a professional woman, (who she had only met that day), SF had jokingly said at one point, "Oh well, I hope you get lucky tonight." The woman had apparently indicated to SF that her comment was inappropriate, and SF avoided the woman for the rest of the conference (field note 1988).*

In a section of the field notes entitled "Looking Stupid", the researcher tells of similar incident that occurred during a severe hangover. She accidentally confused the name and the affiliation of a professional (NF) who she had been hoping to impress throughout the conference. The scene described resulted in a high anxiety level:

> *The event that haunts me to this day, and was the height of stupidity, took place on...(the last day of the conference)...It was when (my friend) and I*

encountered NF outside on the campus and we chatted...NF and I decided to exchange addresses and phone numbers to ensure that he would be kept advised as to the (next year's conference details). I said something about him being from Northern Arizona, (I had him confused with someone else), and for a moment he thought that I was kidding, and he said, "You're not serious, are you?" and as I looked at him blankly he said, 'How much beer have you been drinking lately?" and this made me feel all the more worse than I was already feeling...I apologized profusely for having forgotten his university (field note 1987).

Getting By: Taking a "Free Ride"

An anxiety-provoking condition which seems to affect numerous aspects of the conference experience for most graduate students is that they have limited funds to cover even the essential expenses associated with conferences. Wanting to engage in all aspects of the conferencing process, but lacking the monies to do so can result in feelings of frustration. Financing the conference registration fee, travel expenses, accommodation and meals usually poses as an obstacle for them, making it very difficult to acquire other, what would usually be considered, luxury items, like alcohol and books. In their attempts to in a sense "have it all", graduate students use a number of what will be referred to as "freebies", tactics for the purpose of getting "something for nothing" at conferences. Employing these tactics is, for some graduate students, crucial, for without them even conference attendance alone might be an impossibility. For others,

freebies are essential in order to get what they would see as being the most out of the conference experience. Student priorities at conferences may shift from what are normally considered to be basic human priorities (i.e. food and shelter) as this Neophyte explained:

> *Most of the people I've been connecting with are students, and we're all in the same boat as far as money is concerned, so the things that are maybe more important than eating are books and drinking maybe (Interview #22).*

Successfully getting freebies is most likely if a student has in place, or develops, a network through which information about freebies becomes available. For example, given the researcher's poverty-stricken situation, it is highly unlikely that she would have gone to her first conferences if it had not been for her relationship with her thesis advisor, who was willing to give financial assistance. The advisor's car was driven to Hamilton, she made arrangements for accommodation in her dormitory room, she finagled extra meal passes, and she paid for more than her share of the beer. She also explained that it was possible to attend the conference sessions without in fact paying the registration fee or wearing the name tag that the fee purchased. Most graduate students did not report benefiting from this type of advice and easy access to freebies through a professor. This Veteran, for instance, when told that the researcher had learned about, and chosen not to pay the registration, seemed surprised by this

possibility, and then justified the fact that he had paid by saying:

> *Well I had a choice, but it makes a difference if you're a poor student. I start to get paid July first, you know, on a reasonable rate, so...we only have to pay (the student rate of) forty bucks anyway, only forty bucks (Interview #5).*

Although the majority of graduate students were without freebie guidance and provisions from a professor, they did reveal other means of doing freebies that provided for their conference involvement. For example, if lucky enough to know someone who lives in the city where the conference is being held, they may, for no charge, stay in that person's home. A New Pro told of a situation where her parent's abode became the place for graduate students to "crash", while she provided a shuttle service between the house and the conference site:

> *The night of the party, I stayed at my parents' house with three million people...in my mother's basement...so you know, I was sort of ferrying people back and forth a lot of the time (Interview #12).*

The researcher's two out-of-town conference experiences were similar in that on both occasions, there was no accommodation cost involved. Once an extra bed in a dormitory room was arranged by the thesis advisor, while the other situation involved sleeping on the living room floor of a former graduate student of the same school.

In situations where graduate students had to pay for accommodation, they usually chose to stay on campus because of some of the "frills" that were part of the accommodation package. For example staying on campus eliminates the cost of daily transportation to and from the conference. A Veteran who had made conference arrangements too late to stay on campus complained throughout his interview about how expensive it was to stay off campus. His exposure to social functions was limited as a result, as evidenced in his comment:

> *I could not come back to that party because it was so far away it would have cost me around fifteen, twenty dollars to get back by taxi (Interview #3).*

Another freebie that is possible when staying on campus is that sometimes a buffet breakfast meal will be included in the deal. Such a provision allows for indulgent food consumption that can serve as not one, but two meals, as this pilfering graduate student reported:

> *When I stayed on campus, which really wasn't that great, you know, in terms of compared to even the Journey's End or something like that, and the price difference between the Journey's End and staying there wasn't that great. But on the other hand, there were the other advantages of being here, like getting breakfast. I mean I'm sure, you know...it would have cost, I mean I know how much it costs to buy breakfast, and then if you go for a cheapie breakfast, then you still have to have lunch, and you can't steal a muffin and a banana (when off campus) like I would! (Interview #22)*

As this last quote suggests, graduate students are consistently alert for information about affairs where there

will be free food, and these represent perhaps the most common type of freebie. "Cashing in" of course depends on knowing about when and where these events will be taking place. This well-informed New Pro described his plan to leave the conference after taking in two parties at which there would be free food:

> *I'm leaving after the President throws us a reception...He's going to give us free food...and then we'll swing by the Grad House...So I can eat with the ties, or I can eat with the beer drinkers (Interview #10).*

This Neophyte on her last day at the conference excitedly chatted about her success in finding a number of food freebies during her four day stay:

> *Has anybody had to pay for a meal here yet?...I haven't bought a full meal...There's wine and cheeses, I mean, sometimes I've had to buy a beer...I'm staying in residence, so my breakfast is included, right? So I eat, you know, a humongous breakfast...and you learn, you know, take an extra muffin...you know, for lunch. But when the Grad House had the free pizza, we were all quite willing to go over there and buy beer so that we could get the pizza...And it was the same day as the President's Reception, so we really did not have to buy any food that day at all...I just get by on snackies and stuff like that...I bought one hamburger (Interview #22).*

In a conversation with the same Neophyte, the researcher similarly expressed delight in having benefited from a food and booze freebie by attending at the Women's Caucus/ Feminist Theory wine and cheese party:

> *I was supposed to be working (at the party), so to speak, and it was very lucky for me because it was wine and cheese which meant free wine and cheese (Interview #22).*

Complementary alcoholic beverages are also perceived by graduate students as being a prize. Realizing the importance of alcoholic freebies to graduate students, the researcher relied on providing beer freebies to secure or prolong interviews with students. During a joint interview with a Veteran and a Neophyte who seemed more interested in "girl-watching" than in talking about conferences, a round of beer was bought by the researcher to keep them talking. Later it was recorded in the field notes:

> *Buying drinks for my interviewees works as far as holding their interest for a longer period, but I'm starting to worry about whether my money is going to run out before this conference is over! It feels funny to be acting as if I've got money when I can hardly afford to buy myself beer. I guess it will be worth it in the name of research! (field note 1988)*

Efforts to persuade this New Pro to return for a follow-up interview during a time that he had planned to attend a session resulted in his attempt to profit from a freebie in the process. He said to the researcher:

> *There is no paper at these sessions that is so vital to me that if you wanted to buy me a beer I couldn't be convinced (Interview #10).*

Books also are treasured commodities which are unaffordable, yet sought-after by graduate students. During the aforementioned joint interview with the beer-bribed Veteran (R) and Neophyte (E), when the researcher went to the bar to buy the drinks, the tape recorder was left running with their permission. Upon the researcher's return, the Veteran stated that he had been giving the Neophyte "cues on free

books." The recording revealed that the Veteran had detailed for the Neophyte the freebie process of getting complementary books from the publishers' displays:

> *R: Have you gone, have you hit the book stands yet?*
>
> *E: Yea, I bought one book.*
>
> *R: Well, tell them you're teaching in January. Whenever they think you're going to be using them,*
>
> *E: They give you a discount?*
>
> *R: Oh no, you get free copies.*
>
> *E: Free copies?!*
>
> *R: You see, if you go into an area, and you can't bullshit them too much, and if they don't know you...(you tell them) that you're teaching, and you go around and present a line like: "I teach poverty and strat, unemployment," and stuff like that...so that what you do is you assign this as a supplement and you use a straight text*
>
> *E: Good idea, good plan (Interview #5).*

Getting Through: "Making Like a Professional"

Conference situations which are more professional, as opposed to social, in orientation can also lead to feelings of anxiety in that students see themselves as lacking the experience and often the academic knowledge to be competent among the professionals. A few graduate students admitted feeling as if they were in a sense, "totally out to lunch" when it came to making sense of what it was that the professionals were talking about during their academic

debates in the sessions. The following Veteran, in reflecting on her Neophyte experience, makes this point:

> *I had spent many hours just sitting at the conference, and listening to papers, and not having the faintest idea who was talking, what they were talking about, what they were trying to say, what it mattered, you know (Interview #17).*

This excerpt from an interview reflects the researcher's (I) feelings of inadequacy and frustration when trying to follow the academic discussions, and the Veteran interviewee's (R) agreement with her comments:

> *I: Under most circumstances I don't feel comfortable talking...And I feel like I know absolutely nothing.*
>
> *R: I just see so many pretenses that I just don't want to deal with them. It's like that whole number, you know, what are you doing; or,*
>
> *I: Yea, and then the academic debates...I never know what in the hell they're talking about.*
>
> *R: Yea, exactly.*
>
> *I: (I'm thinking) "What? Did I take that someplace? Should I know what you're talking about?"*
>
> *R: "Is it important?" (Interview #15)*

Being centre-stage as a paper presenter is perhaps the most anxiety-provoking situation for a graduate student at a conference. Here the student is acutely aware of her/his lower status, regardless of prior conference experience. As with other uncomfortable situations, for some, the feelings of anxiety associated with "stage fright" dissipate as more experience at conferences is accumulated. This New Pro

reflects on how he felt presenting a paper for the first time the year before:

> *I was really nervous...when I had to present. I mean I was nervous because it was a new experience. I'm not particularly nervous in front of crowds, or talking to you, but I was nervous about this new form of academic presentation (Interview #19).*

Similarly, the following New Pro recalls being anxious when she delivered her first paper at a conference:

> *Actually all the people except me were really distinguished professors that um, around sixty years old, seventy, most of them have published tons of books and materials, and I felt awful... there they were, talking about sociology of construction and things, I didn't understand anything...It was awful!...I gave my paper and then shut up...I was really a small fish... Actually I regretted, the minute I came into the room, I saw what was happening and I wanted to go out, when it was too late (Interview #11).*

Another first paper presentation at a conference is similarly recalled by this second-time attender:

> *Well I got the feeling that everybody else in the room knew everybody else in the room, and in fact when people had questions, they were all addressed by first name, so I think perhaps I was the outsider as far as that's concerned, because I think some of these sessions maybe do tend to be a little cliquey in the sense that people do know each other ahead of time, or have met at previous conferences, or are working in the same field, or whatever (Interview #1).*

Feelings of anxiety are not restricted to the neophytes however. As told by this Old Pro about her involvement in a recent session:

> *I felt like I was entirely in the wrong company, there was, you know, this hot-shot professor, and this clinical director of some outfit, and 'Oh God, what in the hell am I doing up here', and*

plus I didn't know much of what I was going to say anyway, I felt like I wasn't talking on my subject...There I was, sitting there thinking, "I don't belong up here." (Interview #17)

This New Pro told of feeling very uncomfortable as part of a paper-presenting panel when an individual on this panel was receiving harsh criticism for her paper presentation. Even though the New Pro had never gone through the same ordeal, she experienced the following:

I've never really had a hostile response to my work, although I've certainly been in many sessions where I've seen that happen to people. In fact in the session that I presented my paper a couple of days ago there was a very hostile response, but to another paper on my panel and not to mine, which I found very difficult to deal with, simply by being at the front of the room while this kind of hostility was being directed to the person next to me...it felt very awkward to have this taking place (Interview #2).

A popular tactic employed by anxious graduate student paper-presenters is to rally a crowd of supporters to be present in their session for moral support. This New Pro explained that the main reason he had attended his last two conferences was to show support for some of the paper presenters. In reference to his presence at one of these sessions he said:

I don't usually attend any conference...'cause I knew some people who were presenting, I went for moral support for them rather than, I had an interest in a couple of the papers here, but I didn't have the time to go to them (Interview #18).

With regard to his attendance at the session of another friend, this same New Pro was glad that at least he and a

couple others had gone, because otherwise there would have been no audience per se:

> *(The presenter) had no idea what the audience would be at that one, and as it turned out, I'm glad I showed up, 'cause there was (three of us) from the department and the presenters, and that was all the people who were in attendance, so...he was glad...to see us there (Interview #18).*

Graduate student anxiety can also be relieved through the tactic of relying on supportive professionals who act as mentors in the conferencing process. A New Pro described a session situation in which a professional openly guided a group of her graduate students through their paper presentations:

> *She was supposed to be a discussant, but she shared a session with three of her students, and basically what she was doing, she was coaching them...you could tell that they were all students, and they were presenting papers and they were really nervous...and she was just helping them out, right? And it was a real small class, and you know, you could tell what was going on, and she didn't want to get involved with it because she wanted her students to do it...so I mean it was a lot easier and a more relaxed type of session than if it was something else (Interview #7).*

When asked about the nature of the audience on this occasion, the New Pro indicated that it was essentially "friends" of the panel who were in attendance:

> *It wasn't generally graduate students in there...they were all like colleagues actually, it was interesting, a lot of them were from (the same school) (Interview #7).*

Boosting one's confidence through the use of internal dialogue is another tactic used by graduate students, even

though only a few seemed to be conscious of this practice. As detailed by this Veteran foreign student:

> *Before I get to the stage I will be nervous, but when I stop, I'm not. That's because I think for a moment: "Well, I am the one who's in control." Okay? I'm the one who knows it very well than anyone in the audience who don't know (Interview #4).*

Doing the presentation itself serves to alleviate tension, for generally it seemed that once a person's presentation was in progress, the feelings of anxiety dissipated. In this respect, students are using what might be called the "get it over with" tactic. Some graduate students recognized that for any formal speaking occasion, during the presentation of the paper their anxieties were relieved. The experience was taken for granted by this New Pro:

> *I'm always nervous before I speak, I mean I, I have sweaty palms before I get up in front of my intro class still. (It) goes away...As soon as I start dealing with the issues, I don't know...it just goes away. I'm not, I'm not sort of a baffled person in many ways, these things just happen, so I'm not going to analyze them (Interview #12).*

Perhaps it is the act of speaking out in the session setting that helps most to relieve tension for graduate student presenters. A Veteran noted that it was not until she had ventured to speak in the session, just prior to her own paper presentation, that her anxiety subsided:

> *When I got (there) I was just thinking, "Oh, I just wish this was over!"...And I heard the student speak, and at the end of her topic I found myself immediately with a question for her. I*

felt very anxious asking the question! You know, I just suddenly, as soon as I started to talk, it was just like I just...and I could feel that my face was red, you know, just sort of making this little speech-question...And it was a funny thing. 'Cause for a while it, you know, it took me a little while to unwind from that. And then it was really funny. It was as if that was the part I had to get over with, and I got over with by asking the question. From then on it was a breeze! I couldn't wait to get up there. I didn't want to sit down after I'd talked for forty minutes...So it seems like there's this little process to have to go through in...giving a presentation...It always seems to be the same routine (Interview #17).

Although unspoken, it is also apparent that graduate students, as noted in Chapter 7, rely on the organizational tactics implemented prior to the presentation of a paper as a means of handling the anxiety associated with that event. Furthermore, the identity validation strategies as discussed in Chapter 8 are used as tactics for dealing with paper-presenting anxieties. Graduate students draw upon established identities for handling feelings of anxiety in order to be able to follow through with a paper presentation.

Comic Relief: Seeing the Humourous Side

As was discussed in the previous chapter on identity validation strategies, graduate students who attend conferences aspire to what is often, at least initially seen as being the rather serious, scholastic role of the professional academic. Stars can present a very different side of themselves when they get involved in social

encounters especially when there is a lot of drinking going on. To witness a star engaged in what is perceived to be humorous, uninhibited behaviour can lead to graduate students laughing at the professionals (usually "behind their backs"). Such instances serve as opportunities for comic relief. Humor then becomes a tactic which helps students to cope with their unpleasant feelings of awkwardness, uneasiness or anxiety. Because they are aware, perhaps, of the possibility that as graduate students they may be doing or saying things that make the professionals laugh at them, when they see professors as similarly fallible, it helps to ease graduate student tension. The following field note describes an encounter with a professional (KS) that served as such instance of comic relief:

> *At the hospitality room KS talked about his perceptions of people's bodies in general. He told me that he intended to stop drinking and smoking soon, in an attempt to get himself in shape (this is while he was drinking and smoking (field note 1987).*

Just as graduate students relieve tension through laughing at the professionals, they similarly can relieve tension through laughing at themselves. The following account was taken from a field note that was audio taped as it was told by the researcher to a fellow graduate student the day after the event. A great deal of laughing went on as the story was being told:

Brown Bag Lunch. Sounds pretty informal to me, right? Sounds like you're supposed to bring your lunch and it will be a social thing...So I go half an hour late...(and) on the way there, I stop at the bar-b-que outside and pick up a knockwurst and a salad and a pop, go, walk in...and there are maybe fifteen people at the most...seated in kind of a circle...and I think they're just seated in this circle having lunch, when in fact, two of the people whose backs were to me as I walked into the room, were conducting a formal meeting, okay?...So I walk in and I start talking to everyone..."Oh, so we're all brown-bagging it," and I kept walking, and of course, no one said anything. And I said, "I guess everybody's too busy eating to be talking"...and then I looked...It was really embarrassing. And then I sat down, and of course no one else had brought anything. A couple of people had a token apple in front of them, and there I am with this plate, and all this food...and I have to eat the lunch, or not eat the lunch...I had this white dress on, so I was really worried about dropping stuff on it. It was funny! (field note 1988)

The harsh realities of looking for a job can also account for a student's feelings of anxiety at a conference. This Veteran who had just finished his dissertation, discussed his concern about being successful in his efforts to get work through politicking. He humorously relayed what he described as his *"macabre fantasy"* about those in professional positions in his field:

The demographics of academia is such that, they're getting older, you know, and you're waiting for them to retire, so, you just wait around and look at them, (and think), "Oh, okay, sixty-five, sixty-three, two more years, alright." And you fantasize about plane crashes too, you know, a whole plane load of sociologists crashing, crashing into the Rockies. Of course that's not the end of the dream. I have this recurring thing. What happens is that half of them will survive, but the survivors will have to cannibalize themselves, you know, and only one

finally survives out of all two hundred and thirty (Interview #15).

The same graduate student, when asked if he thought a lot of professors would be retiring in the next four to five years retorted:

I hope so...Doesn't matter, I could wait...As long as I'm not dead. As long as I can walk. Hell, as long as there's wheel chair access! (Interview #15)

In light of the findings uncovered in the last four chapters, the next chapter returns to the typologies introduced in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 10

CONSTRUCTED TYPOLOGY

Returning to the typologies discussed in Chapter 6, it will be recalled that two typologies emerged during the data analysis process. To recapitulate, the typology based on the extent of a graduate student's conference experience involved three types: "Neophytes" were attending their first conference, and tended to be "star-gazers," excited by the intellectual exchanges that they saw taking place; "New Pros," having attended at least one conference before, were somewhat ambivalent with regard to identity issues relating to their place within the professional community; "Veterans," having attended at least a few conferences, identified closely with the professional academic role, and were intent upon "politicking" for the purpose of finding employment. The typology based on interactive styles also involved three types: "Voyeurs" were those individuals who were the least extroverted at conferences, who remained at the periphery of interactions; "Showpeople" drew attention to themselves through active participation in social interaction; "Salespeople" were confident about their abilities to interact in situations, however, they were more selective in terms of where, when, how, and with whom they would interact.

Lofland discusses the usefulness of typologies, or as he calls them, "latent typifications":

> Some of the most important meanings employed in a setting may be unrecognized as such by the participants. One of the key jobs of the social analyst is to articulate such latent meanings, or, to use a current term, latent typifications (Lofland 1984, 74).

It was during the report-writing stage of analysis that it became evident that the above-noted typologies were related. This realization resulted in what is referred to here as a "constructed typology." This constructed typology provides information about the ways in which graduate students are perceived by others according to their classifications within each of the typologies already described. It should be emphasized that these typologies are being used to aid in an understanding of graduate students' behaviours, and are not meant to detract from the complexity of graduate students in the social world of conferences.

To illustrate the constructed typology, the notion of "property space" has been used (Barton 1955). According to Barton, property space is the "on paper" depiction of the "properties" one wishes to illustrate (Barton 1955, 40):

> Properties besides location in physical space can ... be indicated by coordinates....the dimensions on which we "locate" people in property-space can be of different kinds (1955, 40).

Barton goes on to say:

> It is a common practice for both intuitive analysts and empirical researchers to think in terms of a few outstanding "types" of people, situations, or institutions....The understanding of such types will often be assisted if we

> reconstruct the entire property space and see how they were derived from it (Barton 1955, 50).

The emergent properties of these two typologies considered together are graphically represented below in Figure 1.

	Neophytes	New Pros	Veterans
Voyeurs	Underdogs	Chickens	Burn-Outs
Showpeople	Assholes	Performers	Show-Boaters
Salespeople	Empty Promisers	Keeners	Skilled Marketers

Fig. 1. Constructed typology of graduate students as conference participants based on extent of conference experience and interactive style.

Comments on the nature of each of the individual typologies are required. The typology related to conference experience is a progressive typology in that a graduate student's type within this classification is dictated by the extent of the person's conference experience. Therefore, the graduate student who is attending her/his first conference will be labelled a Neophyte. The same graduate student who goes to a second conference will become a New Pro by virtue of the fact that she/he has already been at one conference. The typology related to interactive style is very different to the one based on extent of conference experience in that interactive styles are not necessarily progressive in nature. The interactive style types are

discrete in that a graduate student can be a Voyeur, a Showperson, or a Salesperson regardless of her/his typification as Neophyte, New Pro, or Veteran. As the following discussion will reveal, even though graduate students can occupy any one of the progressive type - discrete type constructions, or combinations, expectations exist as to what is the appropriate construction for a graduate student, given her/his progressive type (Neophyte or New Pro or Veteran).

Before discussing the relevance of this constructed typology, it is important to keep in mind that this research was focused on the situated aspects of graduate students' involvements at conferences. Given then, the focus on the "here and now" aspects of conferencing, this typology suggests that these various types of graduate students will be evidenced in any given conference situation. Therefore, information on a graduate student's passage from one type to another is not included in the following discussion, nor should it be implied that the typology is meant to suggest that an individual will follow a certain path of transition given her/his specific type. As will be explored in the following discussion, even though this research did not centre on how of graduate students move from one type to another, the findings suggest that there are normative expectations with regard to how an individual should move from one constructed type to another.

Based on the findings of the analysis, the most common, or usual, combination of interactive style and conference experience among the graduate students is such that the majority of students are one of three types: Underdogs, or Performers, or Skilled Marketers. This is understandable when we examine the normative expectations with regard to graduate students at conferences. For example, consider the case of the Neophyte. Neophytes are expected to be Voyeurs, because of their limited conference experience, (and consequently their informal role distinction as students of the lowest status). They are expected to "learn the ropes" before engaging in more extroverted interactions. If Neophytes do interact as Voyeurs, they are accepted as Underdogs, and there is a sympathetic attitude manifested toward them, as others understand why it is that they are predominately watching and listening only. Neophytes whose style of interaction is that of Showpeople are not looked upon with sympathy, and they are seen as Assholes. This typing is due to the fact that they have not been afforded the status that entitles them to draw attention to themselves through gregarious interaction. Such individuals deviate from the normative behaviours that are expected of Neophytes, (i.e. Voyeur behaviours). Similarly, Neophytes whose interactive style is that of Salespeople are also deviants. They are seen as being Empty Promisers because in trying to sell themselves, they are engaging in focused

interactions without having gone through what are seen as being the essential prior rites of passage. They are viewed as graduate students who are lacking the necessary awareness that is acquired through watching and listening (as Voyeurs), and establishing reputations (as Showpeople).

With regard to New Pros, it is expected that they will have passed through the Underdog stage, and be ready to engage in the more sophisticated interactions expected of Showpeople. Therefore, to be a Performer as a New Pro is acceptable behaviour. New Pros who do not go beyond watching and listening are seen as Chickens who have not matured beyond the style of interaction expected of Voyeurs. Conversely, New Pros who "hard sell" themselves as employable persons are viewed pejoratively as Keeners, for they have not yet established a reputation among the professionals that entitles them to present as employable.

Veterans are expected to be Skilled Marketers, based on the assumption that they have passed through the Underdog and Performer stages. Those Veterans who are watching and listening only are seen as arrested at a very early stage of interactive development, and are considered Burn-Outs. Veterans who are still drawing attention to themselves in most situations, who are not discriminating among subjects, people and places in terms of interaction, and who are not focused on job-seeking, are viewed by others as Show-Boaters.

In conclusion, although the typology based on interactive style is discrete, like the typology based on conference experience, it is viewed as being progressive in nature. It is expected that a graduate student will progressively move from being a Voyeur, to being a Showperson, to being a Salesperson, commensurate with her/his transition from Neophyte, to New Pro, to Veteran. Those individuals who do not follow this pattern do not conform to what has emerged as being the normative pattern of participation for graduate students.

To summarize, this chapter has introduced the constructed typology of graduate student participation at conferences that emerged during the report writing stage of the data analysis process. While all of these types of graduate students are seen at conferences, the majority of students exemplify the characteristics of the Underdogs, Performers, and Skilled Marketers. This pattern reflects the normative expectation that graduate students should progress not only in terms of types based on extent of conference experience, but also in terms the discrete types based on interactive style. Those who do not progress as expected represent a minority among graduate students.

Having concluded the exploration of the research findings, the final chapter provides a summary of the chapters, a discussion of the implications of the findings, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSIONS

This research has contributed to the field of sociology by providing substantive knowledge about the graduate student experience at sociology conferences, and through contributing to already existing sociological concepts. In this chapter, the Summary section includes the substantive findings. The Discussion section addresses the research's contribution to existing sociological concepts. Finally, the Recommendations section proposes future research directions.

Summary

Although they have become an important aspect of professional life in many occupations, conferences represent an area that has been largely overlooked in social science research. The extent to which conferences serve as important professionalizing situations is not well understood, given the absence of substantive research on conferences, the shortage of information on adult socialization in general, and into the role of professional scholar in particular. The process of professionalization in terms of the conference experience is unique in that conferences are structured, limited encounters, as opposed to more multi-faceted experiences which extend over a longer period of time. Graduate student involvement at conferences

is relatively low, and it appears that professional sociology and anthropology associations have, for the most part, ignored the professionalization of graduate students. Focusing on a comparably small population, this research looks at some of the processes of professionalization for a group of aspiring academics.

Using a symbolic interactionist perspective, an attempt was made to capture the complexity of the graduate student experience. The focus was on involvement as situated activity as it unfolded within the context of multiple involvements. Of primary interest were the strategies and role tactics employed by graduate students. Role making and role taking emerged as being central to the professionalization process. The concept of dramaturgy was useful in understanding impression management techniques. The formation of identity was also integral to the graduate student experience, and social comparison processes were evident. Role strain and cognitive dissonance were seen in problematic situations in which coping strategies were used.

The researcher, involved as both a conference organizer and guest, had excellent opportunities to develop an intimate familiarity with the graduate-student world at conferences. Through participant observation, intensive interviewing, and casual conversations, data were gathered on graduate students' experiences. During two large scale

and two smaller conferences, field notes were recorded, and 25 interviews taped.

The structural aspects of the conferences were such that graduate students, as lower status participants, engage in an intensive program within the campus setting. There they engage in a variety of activities including scheduling, attending papers, presenting papers, and socializing.

Two typologies emerged during the data analysis process. One, based on conference experience, consisted of Neophyte, New Pro, and Veteran types. The second, based on interactive styles, consisted of Voyeurs, Salespeople, and Showpeople as types.

One of the most pervasive themes of this research is that conference-going graduate students view conferences as an essential element if their socialization into an academic role. A brief review of the analysis findings highlights the ways in which they handle themselves during this process. Three themes emerged as being central to their conference experience: 1) graduate students see conferences as an aid to "getting ahead" 2) graduate students see conferences as taking them from isolation to the "real world"; 3) graduate students encounter uncomfortable situations at conferences. In dealing with these aspects of conferences, graduate students employ three main strategies: 1) impression management; 2) identity validation; 3) coping strategies. Using these strategies, they attempt to do a

number of things: 1) As impression managers, they engage in "learning the ropes," becoming recognized, and marketing themselves; 2) As identity validators, they engage in assessing their academic identities, validating their scholarly identities, and maintaining their human identities; 3) As "copers", they engage in getting along, getting high, getting by, getting through, and getting comic relief. In order to successfully carry out these strategies, graduate students actively utilize a number of role tactics: 1) watching and listening, doing performances and initiating interaction, and "politicking" tactics make up impression management strategies; 2) social comparison processes, "tuning in" and "tuning out," and seeing profs as people and holding on to the "fun" self make up identity validation strategies; 3) social support seeking, "boozing it up," taking a "free ride," "making like a professional," and seeing the humourous side make up coping strategies.

Through the use of a constructed typology derived from the aforementioned typologies, the way in which the two typologies are related revealed that expectations exist in terms of what is the "appropriate" interactive style with respect to conference experience. Discrete interaction styles are viewed as being progressive, commensurate with the progressive nature of types based on conference experience. As evidence of this normative expectation, a graduate student is most likely to be one of three types

within the context of this typology: Underdog, Show-Off, or Skilled Marketer.

Discussion

Graduate students differ from professionals in conferences situations in that they have not secured a professorial employment position within the field. Usually their only affiliation is with their home school. One of the interesting aspects of the conference situation is that it provides an opportunity for graduate students to leave the rather isolated confines of their school, and meet numerous people from many geographic locales. Even though, in terms of time, it is a concentrated professionalization experience, conferences are perceived by participating graduate students as having the potential to have a major impact on their careers. These graduate students, although not always able to specify the ways in which the conferencing experience will impact their futures, have some notion of the importance of making a good impression at conferences, and it is suggested that conference exposure can positively influence a graduate student's future career. For example, the professionals encountered there might be in a position of hiring the student in the future. Or perhaps one of the professionals met at a conference will later review the graduate student's paper for publication. The general reputation established at the conference might, at

some time, lead to the sale of more books for the graduate student. The conference provides perhaps the only forum wherein a graduate student will be able to gain a wide exposure to so many professionals within her/his discipline.

The findings of this research suggest that conferences are important professionalization experiences. If this is the case, why is it that more graduate students do not become involved in the conferencing process? Contrary to what might be expected based on Pease's study of doctoral students' participation in professional meetings (1967), most of the graduate students interviewed for this research denied that they had been encouraged to attend conferences. The vast majority of professionals who work with graduate students pay only minimal attention to this area. It seems to be the case that it is not the policy of departments to emphasize to students the values inherent in conference attendance. For example, it is usually the case that graduate students, if they are to be notified at all, receive notification of an upcoming conference by way of a couple of paragraphs in a reproduced memo, or by seeing a posted notice on a bulletin board. Although the field was entered with the expectation that graduate students would be in attendance as a result of encouragement from, and promotion by, professionals with whom they had formal or informal relationships, very different accounts were given by graduate students. In fact when asked about who

encouraged them to attend, the majority of graduate students reported that they had not been encouraged to attend, but had ended up there of their own accord. In fact, many reported that the exact opposite had been the case, and that they had been mocked by professionals at their home schools. Such reports from graduate students raise questions about both professionals as role models, and the role of conferences in the professional lives of academics.

This research has generic implications. Prus strongly recommends "linking (ethnographic)... materials together at a conceptual level (1987, 251).

According to Prus:

> "Generic social processes" refers to the transituational elements of interaction, to the abstracted formulations of social behavior. Denoting parallel sequences of activity across diverse contexts, generic social processes highlight the emergent, interpretive features of association; they focus on the activities involved in the "doing" or accomplishment of group life (1987).

The research perspective used in this study framed conference participation (conferencing) as a professionalization social process, and the emphasis on the development of this and other generic concepts is evidenced by this processual orientation of the analysis (i.e. graduate students doing activities). Two pronounced sub-themes of the professionalization process at conferences emerged as being impression management and identity validation processes. The parallels between these

processes and similar processual aspects of the professionalization of students in professional schools has contributed to the existing generic concepts developed by studies in this area (Becker et al. 1961; Becker and Strauss 1956; Haas and Shaffir 1977, 1982; Hornosty 1989; Kadushin 1969; Schreiber 1987).

Although the analysis revealed conceptual findings similar to other studies on professionalization, the situation of graduate students at conferences is different given the structured, limited-encounter aspects of the situation. Such features suggest parallels with Dietz's work on ballet dancers (1985), in that as they move from the student to the apprentice stage, dancers undergo an audition for the professional school or company to which they aspire. Dancers' isolated social world, their low positions of status relative to the professionals, and the emphasis on impression management and performance in the brief, structured audition situation are similar to the graduate student conferencing situation. However, conference situations differ from auditions in that conference performances extend over the period of a few days, they take place amidst a multitude of competing activities, professionals and graduate students, and they are one of many elements which will determine whether or not the student ultimately "gets the part."

In considering other situations which are characterized by structured, limited encounters, it is difficult to think of one case that totally parallels the unique aspects of the conference situation. For example, short-term vacations of the ocean cruise variety, represent situations in which encounters structured and limited. Still, those who meet on cruises are not as likely to develop the long-term, or at least periodically renewed, relationships typical of conference participants. Compared to conference participants, vacationers would tend not to consider (or at least not put as much weight on) the future repercussions of reputations that are established with "strangers" who they encounter during a trip.

Recommendations

While furthering our understanding about sociology conference-going graduate students, the research raises some questions as to the generalizability of the findings to conference-going graduate students in other disciplines. What role does a conference play in the professionalization process of graduate students in other disciplines? Even more pressing is the question: What is going-on with sociology graduate students who do not attend conferences? What is the nature of their graduate school experience? Are they socialized in another way? In general, what are the implications of the conferencing process in terms of the

larger picture of the graduate student experience? In terms of an individual's future career pursuits? Furthermore, it would be interesting to also look at the conferencing experiences of professionals in sociology and other disciplines. Of what importance are conferences in the eyes of the professional community as a whole? Research aimed at answering these questions is advocated.

Because the research focus has been on the situated aspects of conference involvement, it is recommended that, by building on the concept of career contingencies, (Prus 1984), we endeavour to understand the nature of the conferencing experience not only in terms of the situated aspects of intensified involvement, but also with more of a temporal perspective. By looking at recruitment, disinvolvement and re-involvement as they apply to the conference situation, a broader understanding of the conference experience would result. Given the questions already raised, it would be worthwhile also to understand more about recruitment, involvement, and disinvolvement, not only as they occur in conferences situations, but also as they are realized in professional associations, and the academic profession in general. By focusing future research on these kinds of generic concepts that are inherent in the professionalization process, we will expand our understanding of the professionalization of not only

academics, but of others who aspire to other professional careers.

As was suggested in the discussion of generic implications above, although conceptual comparisons can be made with existing sociological knowledge, the rare features of the conference setting suggest that the processes taking place there may also be unique. It is recommended that future research examine generic concepts in situations which are more characteristic of the atypical conference situation.

APPENDIX A

WHY I BELONG TO THE ASA

by Earl Babbie, ASA Membership Committee

When I was first invited to write this article, I was initially at a loss for words, something I dread more than...oh, certainly more than zits or getting a bad piece of fish in a cheap restaurant. I didn't know why I belonged to the ASA! I had to confess that each year's renewal was a casual, thoughtless act on my part. God, I was so ashamed.

I agreed, nonetheless, to reflect on my past behavior, perhaps to grow in the process and possibly contribute something to others through a baring of my own experience. It has, in fact, been a rewarding process for me, and I am at last able to share some of what I have discovered with you.

I first joined the ASA some 25 years ago, as a graduate student at Berkeley. I seem to recall that it happened in a theory class taught by Neil Smelser and Phil Selznick, and someone (let's just say the "pusher") passed out ASA membership cards. The pusher made it sound as though joining the ASA was a rite of professional passage — a short cut to joining the big kids of sociology.

Talcott Parsons belonged to the ASA, we were told. So did Merton and Lazarsfeld. I still remember Smelser and Selznick kind of hinting that they belonged, although I can't remember if they actually said so at the time. In any event, it seemed an acceptable thing to do right there in class. In fact the prevailing sentiment seemed to be that you weren't a "real" sociologist unless you did it.

Ever since my undergraduate days, I had wanted to be like Talcott Parsons, and while I had the body-shape well underway, I could never get the moustache to look real. so I decided to take the easy way out. I picked up my membership card, flourished my pen in a way that everyone could see what I was doing, and I joined the ASA. Now I was like Talcott Parsons.

That first enrollment in ASA probably didn't have to amount to anything permanent, but my destiny was something else. I began receiving ASA journals of all kinds. some I understood, some I didn't, but through them all I gained a broader sense of the life I had laid out for myself. I became familiar with the research of colleagues, who had chosen that same life.

Publications like Footnotes exposed me to the "professional" as distinct from the "scientific" aspect of sociology. I began thinking of the role of sociology in society. Like many first-time ASA members, I found myself

dreaming about what American society would be like if everyone were...you know...into sociology.

Soon I discovered that ASA membership and attendance at the annual meetings went hand in hand. The prevailing notion was that if you were sociologist enough for ASA membership, you could probably handle the heavier stuff. Moreover, the meetings that year were being held across the bay in San Francisco. (Coincidence? I think not.) the next thing I knew, I was a meetings junkie: travelling from one end of the country to the other in search of the roundtables, didactic sessions, book displays, section meetings - I did it all. I didn't even like some of the sessions I attended, but I just couldn't stop.

Now I've come to look forward to the next annual convention as a high point in any year. It's a chance to catch up quickly on the new stuff just starting to circulate and always an opportunity to honor our mutual roots. I enjoy immersing myself in a critical mass of fellow sociology addicts. (There, I've said it.)

I know that some people misunderstand sociologists: some spell it "socialogist" and half my friends still pronounce it "so-shee-ologist," but I don't care. I am a sociologist, and my ASA membership says I'm not just someone who took a sociology course once, when I was young and inexperienced. In that sense, my ASA membership has become an obvious, unconscious part of who I am and what I'm about.

So that's my story. I know it may have been a little too sordid or graphic for some readers, but I think I've only said what had to be said. Yes, I am a member of the American Sociological Association, and I'm not ashamed to say so. I could argue that I'm caught up in an unconscious renewal habit, but that would be a lie now. I have reviewed my life and taken responsibility for my actions. It has been my choice to renew in ASA year after year, and I intend to continue doing so, no matter what the consequences.

My fervent, unashamed advice to you is this: when you are asked to open or renew a membership in the American Sociological Association:

Just say yes.

APPENDIX B

GRADUATE STUDENTS AND THE ASA

by Lorna Lueker, University of California - San Diego

During the January 8-10, meeting of the Membership Committee in Washington, DC, Bill D'Antonio posed the question "Why should graduate students join the ASA?" As a graduate student, and a member of the ASA, I decided to answer this question concerning the importance of membership in a professional association. A professional association serves as a common link for a group of individuals, provides information on developments in a field, brings members together to share and cultivate ideas. Many associations provide, or help members secure, funds for educational purposes or research projects. the American Sociological Association does these things with considerable success.

The immediate benefit to graduate students joining the ASA is that it brings them into touch with the professional community of sociology. Graduate students who join the ASA receive either a general journal in sociology (American Sociological Review or a specialized one of particular interest). Nine times a year, all members receive Footnotes, an informative newsletter on developments within the professional community. The newsletter and journal help to keep members aware of current issues and debates within sociology.

The Association provides information on forthcoming meetings and workshops, summer programs, and competitions for awards and fellowships. Graduate students finishing their degrees can find several post-doctoral opportunities listed regularly under the funding section of the newsletter. For the student seeking information on graduate programs, the ASA provides detailed information on departments which award advance degrees in sociology (Guide To Graduate Departments).

Current members may participate in the annual meeting. This provides the opportunity to meet other students and to gain first-hand information about their graduate programs as well as scholarships, fellowships and other funding opportunities. In addition, PhD students, for a modest fee, gain access to the employment Services at the annual meeting. this service offers individuals the opportunity to browse an extensive list of job openings and interview with prospective employers.

Aside from the tangible benefits of membership in the ASA is the serendipitous development of professional capital. Active participation in the ASA can aid one in making the transition from starry-eyed student to professional sociologist. The year I joined the ASA, the

annual meeting took place in San Antonio, Texas. I was a first year MA student at a small state university in California. The opportunity to hear well-known and renowned sociologists - who until that time were simply authors of the books I read - was exciting. I suppose, in a sense, they were idols. During the San Antonio meeting, Kingsley Davis chaired the first paper session I attended, while Gerhard Lenski presented his current work. I was both impressed and yet relieved. It's that "oh" feeling you get when something long anticipated finally comes about and it is not what you expected. I realized that these individuals were scholars, authors, and human beings, not omnipresent forces. Since then, I have been to several paper sessions at various conferences and have met many well known sociologists. While I am still the apprentice, and they are the professionals, I have learned to capitalize on relationships to develop my sociological skills. Membership in the ASA and active participation in annual meetings has helped me, to accomplish this goal.

Attending the annual meeting encourages one to take part in debates within the field. As members of the Association, students are welcome to submit papers to any paper session, or serve as discussants for someone else's paper. Both formal paper sessions and roundtable sessions provide the opportunities for graduate students to become active participants. These experiences add to both professional and personal growth; presenting helps one learn to overcome anxiety about speaking in front of large groups of people, and it gets your work known in the sociological community. Also it is a way of getting feedback on a paper from persons outside your department.

Membership in the ASA allows you to join a network of professional sociologists. Through Footnotes, contacts at meetings and through friendships established, various opportunities may present themselves. Networking is a key means of spreading the word of a job, or an offer to submit a paper for presentation or publication. Membership in the ASA is a means to acquiring valuable information, and an aid to professional development.

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VITA AUCTORIS

Debra Amy Matheson was born on January 9th, 1955 to Velda and Allan Matheson, in Leamington, Ontario, Canada. She attended Ridge Public School in Leamington, and graduated from Grade 12 at Leamington District Secondary School in June 1973. Following a Qualifying Year at Carleton University, she pursued a four year Honours Degree in Psychology, graduating from Carleton in September, 1979. From 1980 to 1986 she worked for the Department of the Solicitor General, in the Correctional Services Division of the Provincial Government of Alberta, as a Probation Officer in Rocky Mountain House, and Red Deer, Alberta, and as a Caseworker, and Drug and Alcohol Education Coordinator in Belmont Correctional Centre, Edmonton. She returned to Ontario in 1986, and in January 1987 she was admitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Windsor. She received her M.A. in Sociology at the University of Windsor in June 1989, and will begin a Ph.D. degree at the University of Waterloo in September 1989.

her stars had turned out to be less than a shining example of the professional academic that she had envisioned:

> *I mean he was so intimidating, I thought "What a big-mouth jerk!" you know? And he was. I mean he was well-published, sure, and he's got a lot of good stuff, but I mean, for the most part as an individual he's a big-mouth blow-hard, you know? He's a bully. He's a bully...For all his publications I thought that this was going to be an academic, you know? But he's a jerk (Interview #24).*

Star gazing also serves to inform the graduate student as to the approachability of the professional. Getting a sense of whether a professional is likely to be open to your efforts to make contact is crucial for venturing impression management strategies which follow from watching and listening. This New Pro discusses the aspect of approachability by contrasting one type of professional with another:

> *I talked to him a little bit after the end of his (paper) but he's, you know, a really nice person, and you know that he's an approachable person, whereas another person could get up there, present their paper in a very academic fashion and not seem to be that dramatic or enthused about the research. And then, well, I'm interested in it, but I don't go and approach them or nothing, you can get that type of impression of a person (Interview #18).*

A Veteran similarly talks of "reading" a person's openness to being approached:

> *There are certain people who's air, the aura that they present is one of impermeability. I'm not going to, you know, risk my ego, and go up to someone who clearly portrays this aura of 'I'm clearly too important to speak to anybody else.' No! Forget that. They're not worth my time (Interview #16).*

Name tags also play an important part in the process of determining who to approach, as is recognized by this foreign-student Veteran:

> *First I will of course read your front with everyone's name, and without their knowledge I will just, you know, if I sit beside you, or I will stand and have a coffee somewhere. I'll just look up the name tag (and)...if the name is familiar...I will introduce myself and I will talk about my other research interests and focus on what I did...if I admire them, or have an appreciation for them for any kind of work they do ...and if the personality is not really pleasant, (and)...only the subject area is of interest to me, I don't. By talking to somebody else, or by the way they look, I can easily understand (Interview #4).*

Becoming Recognized: Doing Performances and Initiating Interaction

Graduate students recognize that, in order to get ahead, it is essential to establish a reputation during the conferencing process. In order to establish a reputation, a graduate student must go beyond the information-gathering process of watching and listening to the process of becoming recognized as a unique individual who has a separate identity. The majority of graduate students then, in a sense, see a need for, and strive to undergo a transformation from invisible to visible person within a particular academic circle or community. A New Pro discusses the importance of making this transition:

> *If you don't have an identity, you're not a significant object in their field at all. And if you're not a significant object, it's much less*